



ROBERT E. KNOWLES

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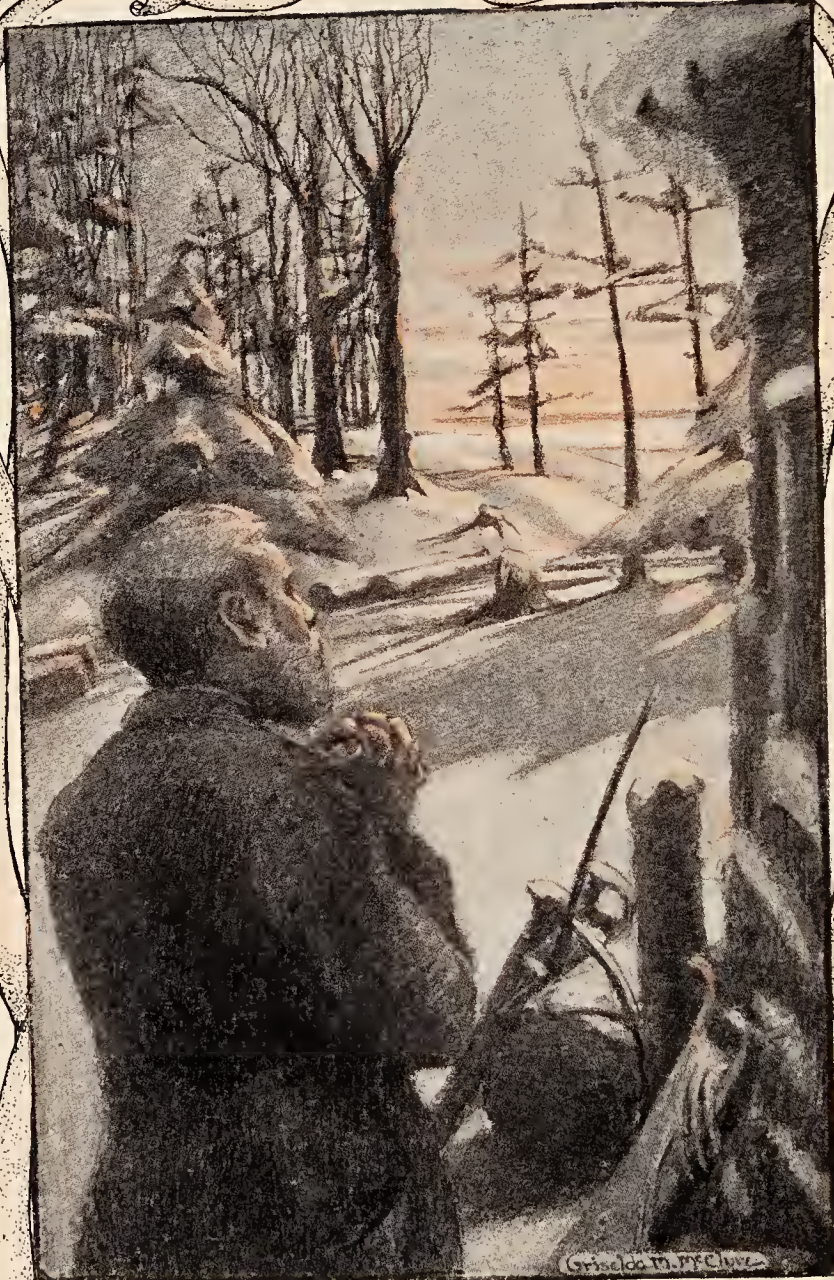


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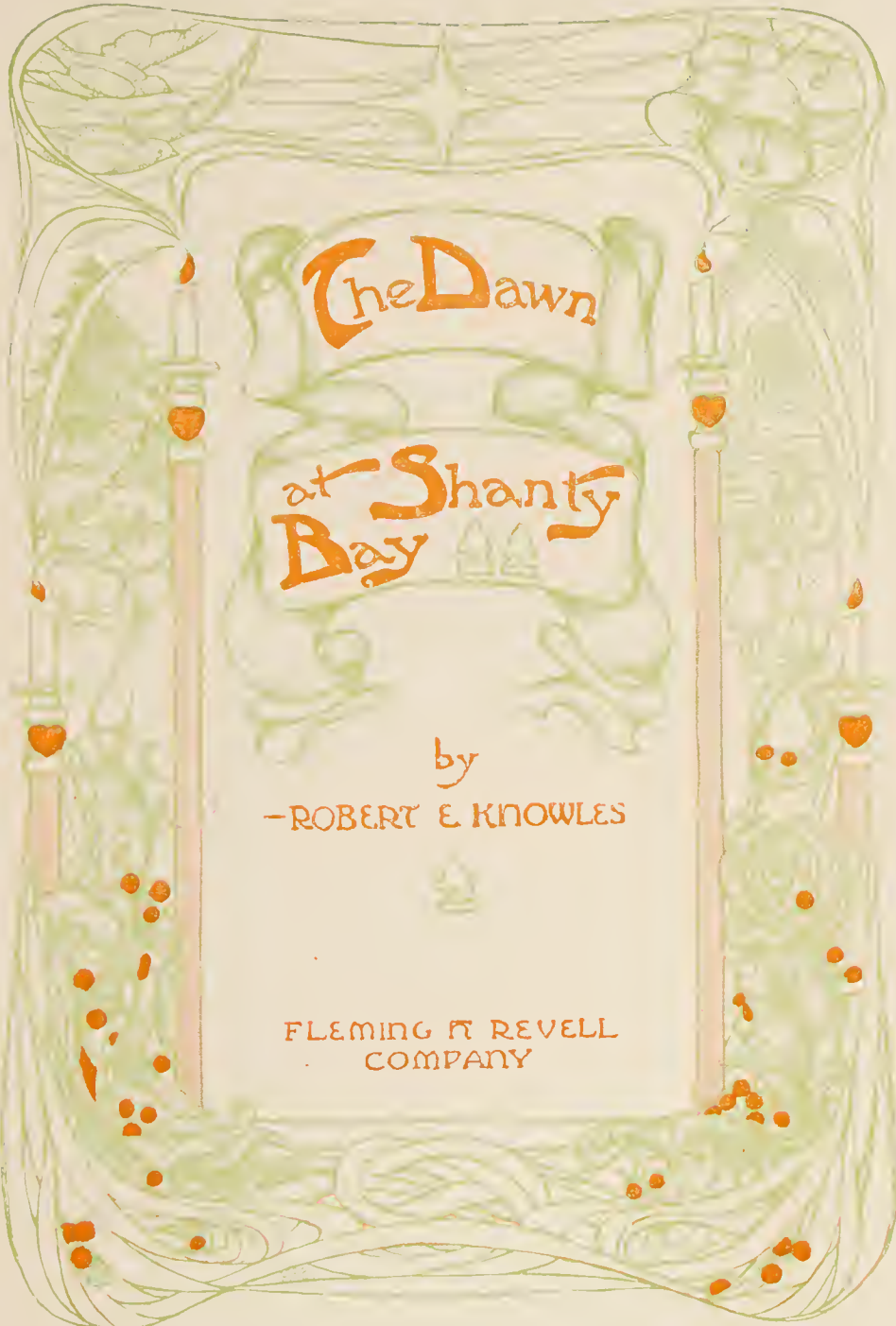
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The Dawn

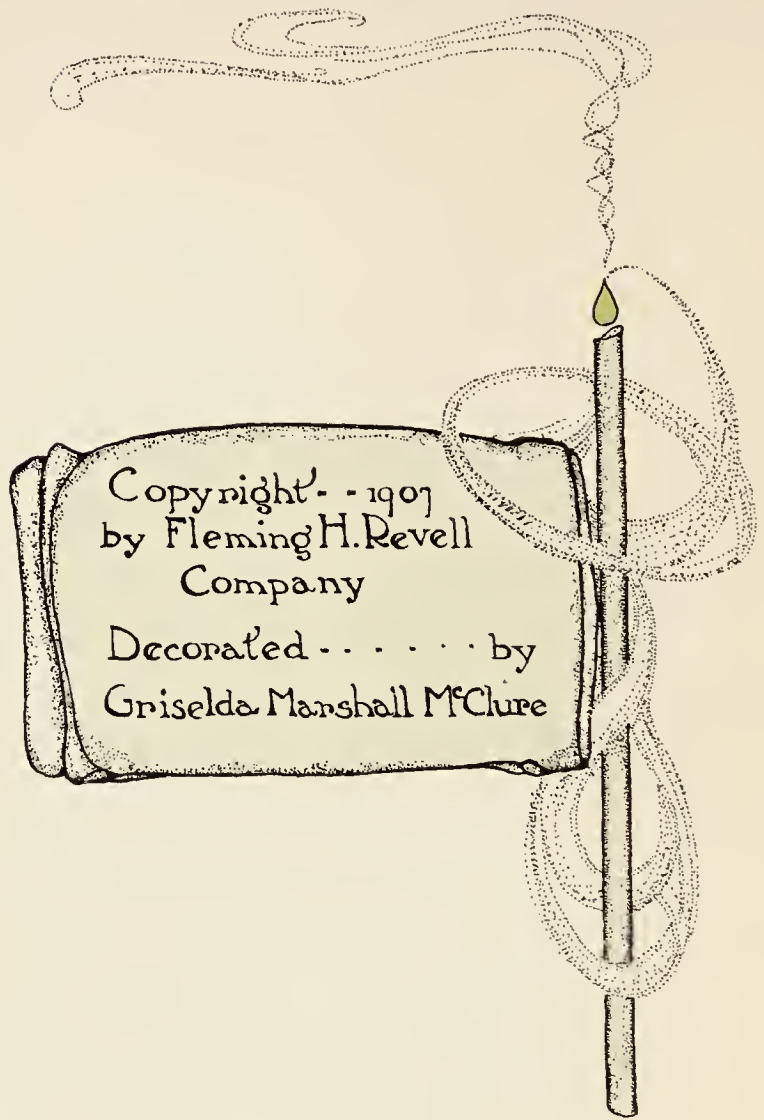
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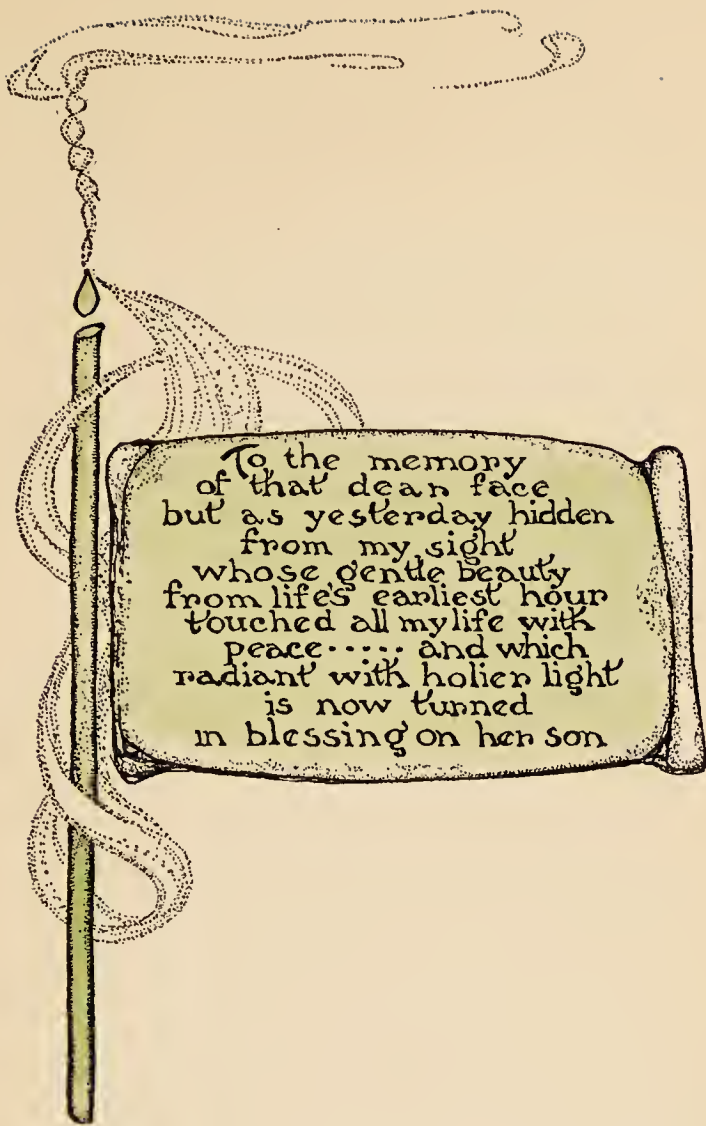
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-ROBERT E. KNOWLES

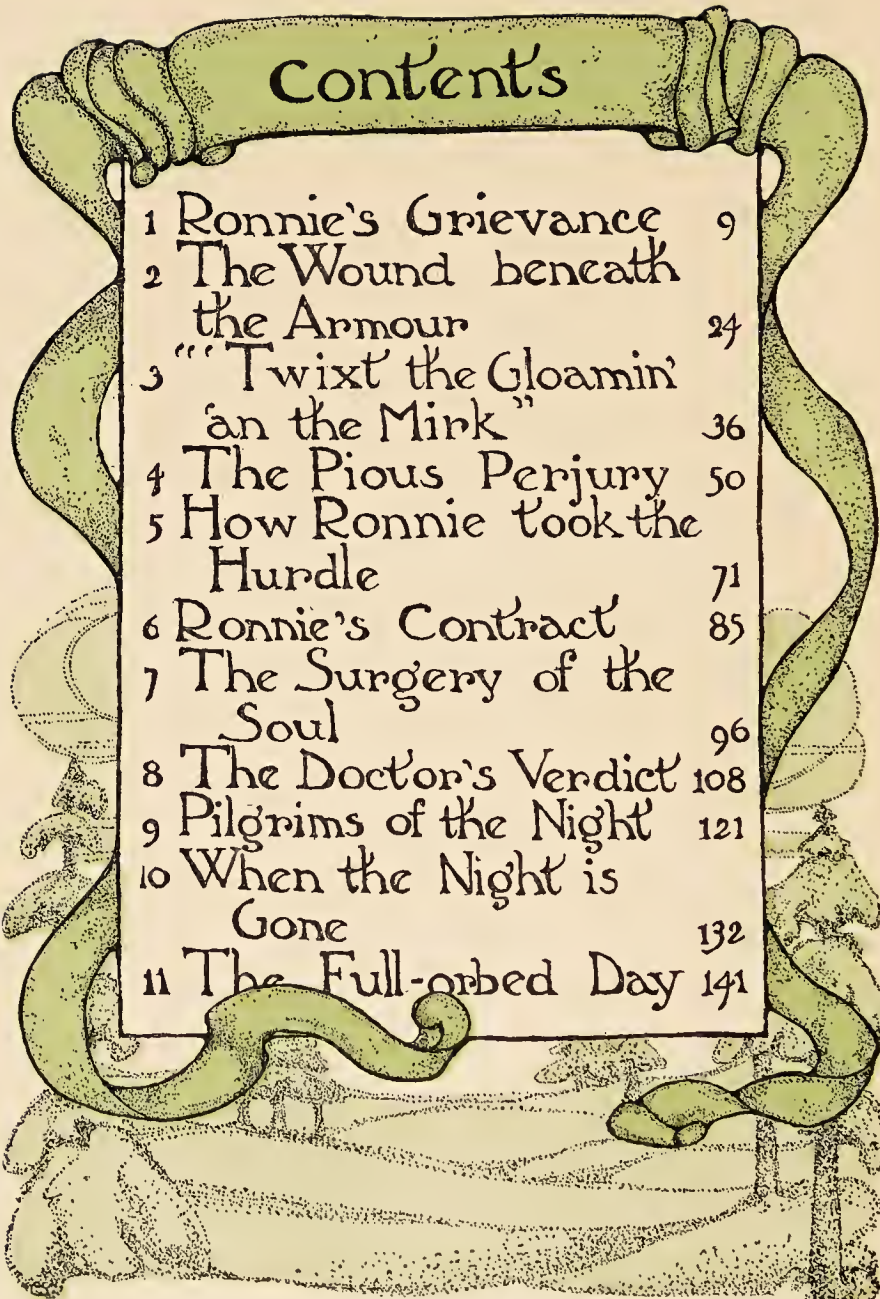
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To the memory
of that dear face
but as yesterday hidden
from my sight
whose gentle beauty
from life's earliest hour
touched all my life with
peace..... and which
radiant with holier light
is now turned
in blessing on her son



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Ronnie's Grievance

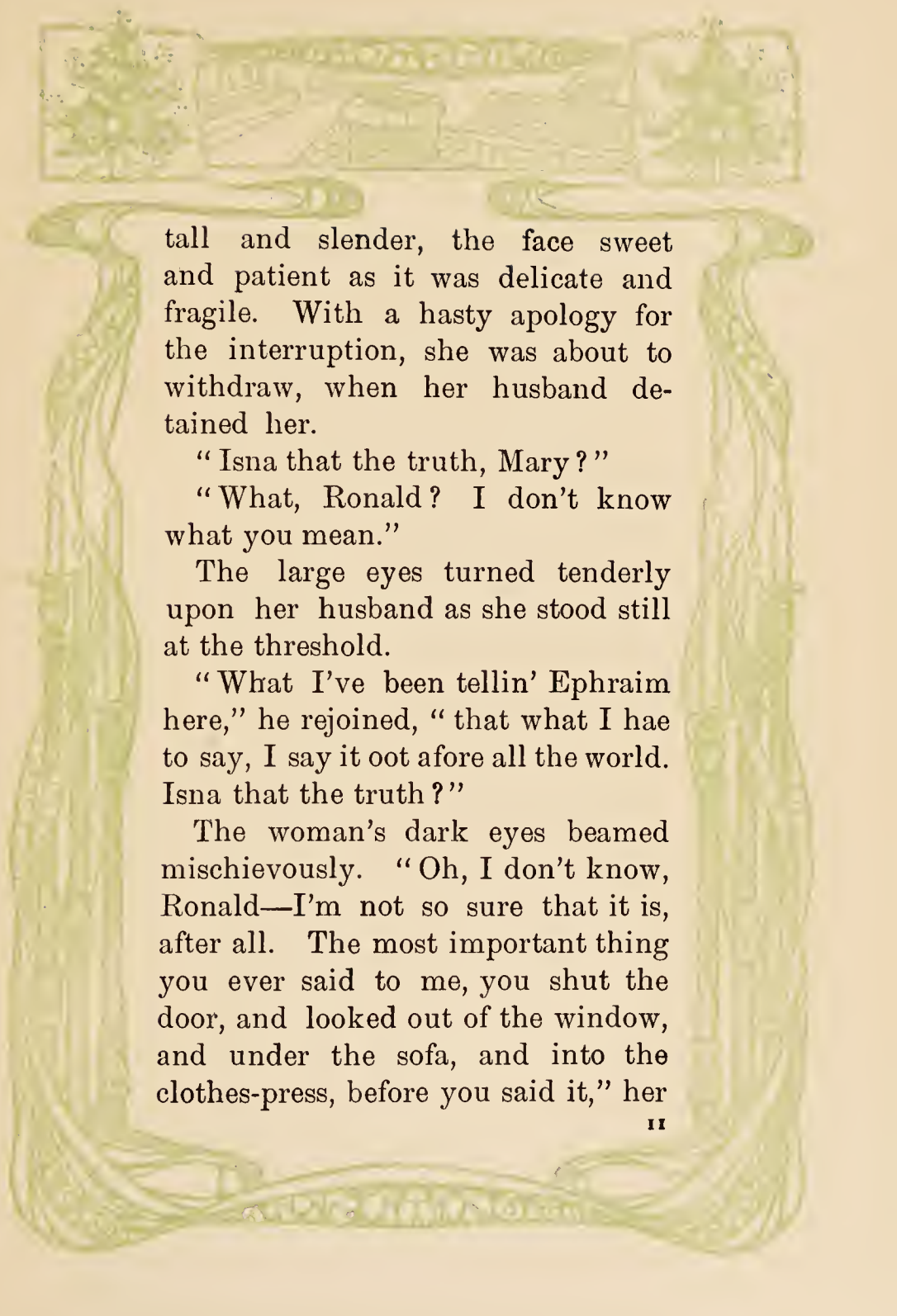


ONLY those who understand the Scottish temperament would have known that there had been a struggle. For Ronald Robertson was wondrous tranquil as he stood aside to let Ephraim Raynor pass before him into the old-fashioned, low-roofed farmhouse that was Ronald's home. This outer tranquillity was the evidence of inward storm—and portentous was the over placid brow; for martial peace is Scottish born, and the Scot alone can be violently calm.

This ominous composure was relaxed a little as Ronald showed his companion to the little parlour, bowing him toward a large rocking chair in the corner. The stern host seated himself squarely opposite, his eyes fixed upon the other's face, his lips moving irresolutely as if torn betwixt speech and silence. Finally he spoke:

"Ye ken, Ephraim, I'm no yin o' the kind as gangs mutterin' to himsel'. What I hae to say, I say it oot. I've often noticed, at the annual meetin' of the kirk, there's aye some as won't open their mouth at the meetin'—but they dae a fearsome yappin at the sheds when they're getting oot the sleighs, after it's a' over. I'm no that kind, Ephraim."

The visitor smiled as he looked at the intense face before him. He was about to speak when the door opened quickly to admit a woman's form,



tall and slender, the face sweet and patient as it was delicate and fragile. With a hasty apology for the interruption, she was about to withdraw, when her husband detained her.

"Isna that the truth, Mary?"

"What, Ronald? I don't know what you mean."

The large eyes turned tenderly upon her husband as she stood still at the threshold.

"What I've been tellin' Ephraim here," he rejoined, "that what I hae to say, I say it oot afore all the world. Isna that the truth?"

The woman's dark eyes beamed mischievously. "Oh, I don't know, Ronald—I'm not so sure that it is, after all. The most important thing you ever said to me, you shut the door, and looked out of the window, and under the sofa, and into the clothes-press, before you said it," her

voice rippling into low laughter as she went on.

Mr. Raynor broke into open merriment, interrupted by Ronald's Doric :

"That's no fair—yon was a speecial occasion. Forbye, I tellt the same thing to yir faither the next day—an' what's mair, I said it again i' the kirk the next September, afore a' the world. Ah, wumman, I hae ye there."

But his wife did not tarry to prolong the argument, closing the door jauntily with a little curtsey, leaving the two men to the conversation she had interrupted. Ronald drew his chair a little nearer to his friend.

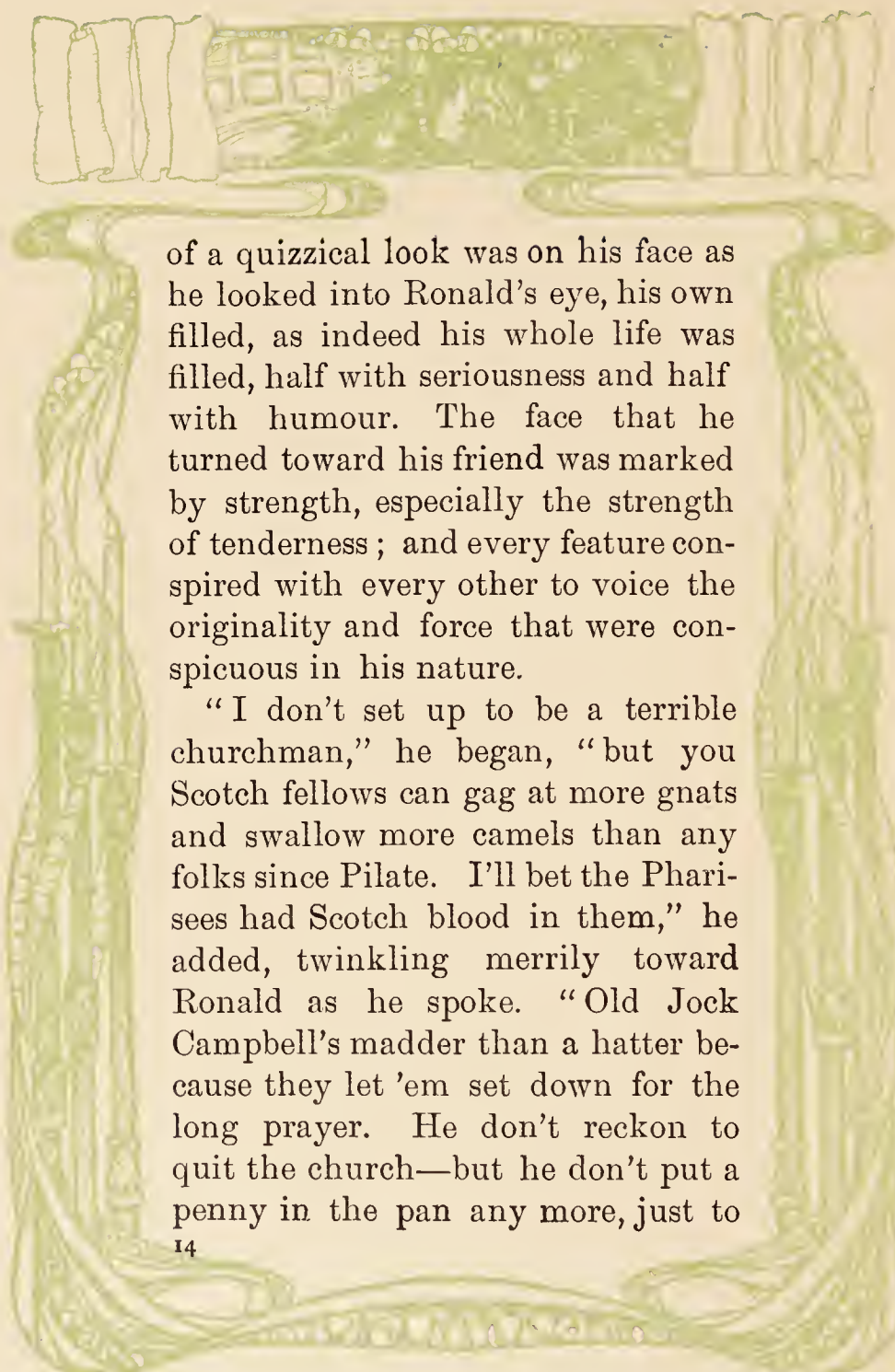
"Mind ye," he began, "it's no that I dinna love the Hoose o' God ; ye ken fine there's nae man loves it mair. But I canna stand the likes o' yon that we had the last Sabbath I was there—why man, she fair duckit her heid like she was gangin' doon a

cellar stair. An' they a' jined in at the Lord's Prayer like a lot o' bairns sayin' a piece—'twas clean ridickilous."

"What's that, Ronald?" the visitor interrupted. "Who—who bent her head? I didn't see no bowin' or scrapin'."

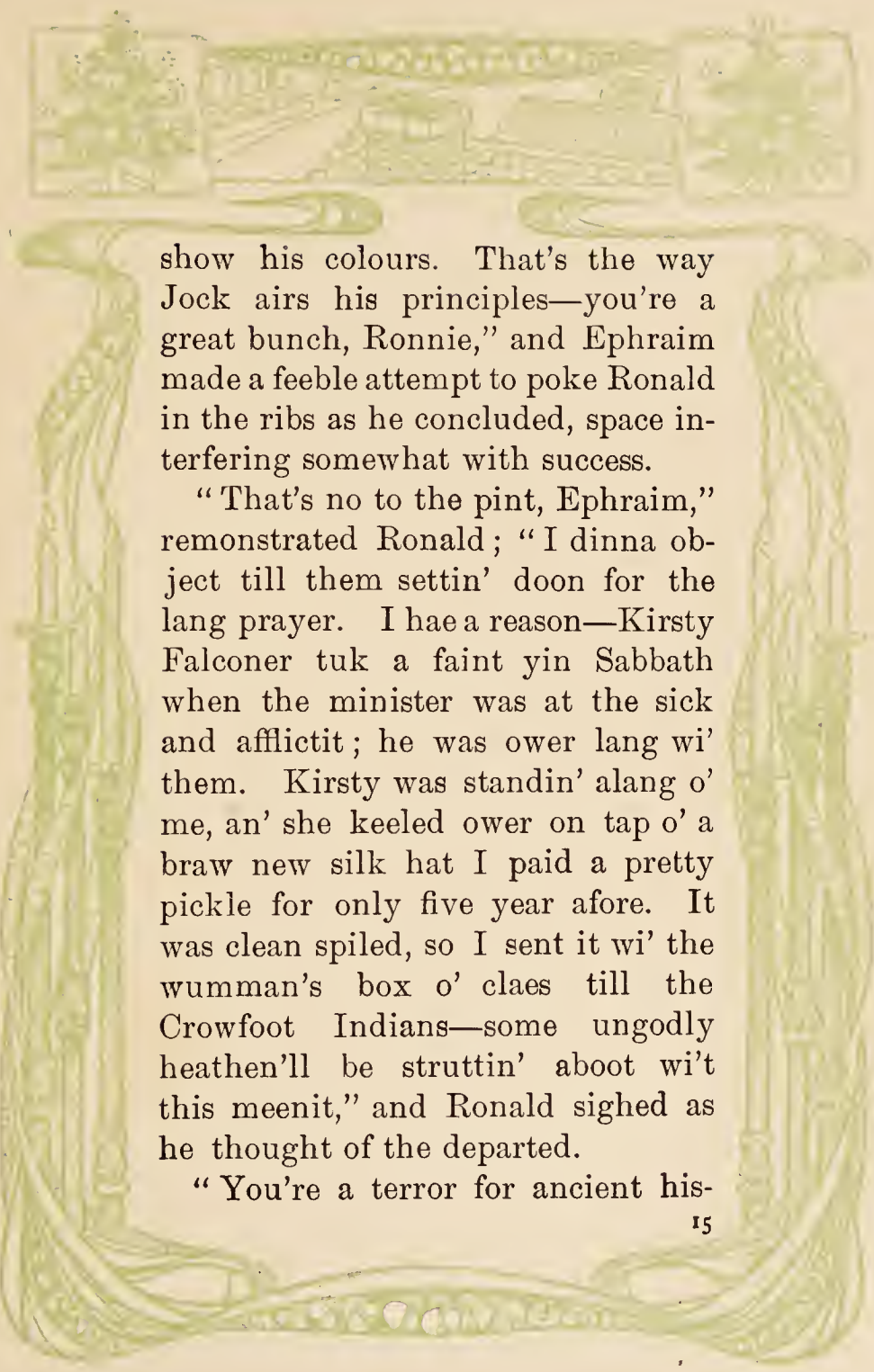
"Ye mind it fine—it was yon grand singer frae the city, wha sang the hymn—'Jerusalem the Golden,' I think they ca' it; an' when she cam till the line, 'Jesus in mercy bring us,' she bowed her heid when she spoke His name. An' that was in a Presbyterian kirk, mind ye—an', what's mair, it was in oor ain kirk; an' I says to mysel', 'Weel, if they're gaein' ower to Rome, I'll bide by mysel', an' I'll worship as my faithers worshipped; an' they can gang their ain gait.' Noo ye ken why I've quit St. Andrew's."

For nearly a minute Ephraim Raynor made no reply. Something



of a quizzical look was on his face as he looked into Ronald's eye, his own filled, as indeed his whole life was filled, half with seriousness and half with humour. The face that he turned toward his friend was marked by strength, especially the strength of tenderness; and every feature conspired with every other to voice the originality and force that were conspicuous in his nature.

"I don't set up to be a terrible churchman," he began, "but you Scotch fellows can gag at more gnats and swallow more camels than any folks since Pilate. I'll bet the Pharisees had Scotch blood in them," he added, twinkling merrily toward Ronald as he spoke. "Old Jock Campbell's madder than a hatter because they let 'em set down for the long prayer. He don't reckon to quit the church—but he don't put a penny in the pan any more, just to



show his colours. That's the way Jock airs his principles—you're a great bunch, Ronnie," and Ephraim made a feeble attempt to poke Ronald in the ribs as he concluded, space interfering somewhat with success.

"That's no to the pint, Ephraim," remonstrated Ronald; "I dinna object till them settin' doon for the lang prayer. I hae a reason—Kirsty Falconer tuk a faint yin Sabbath when the minister was at the sick and afflictit; he was ower lang wi' them. Kirsty was standin' alang o' me, an' she keeled ower on tap o' a braw new silk hat I paid a pretty pickle for only five year afore. It was clean spiled, so I sent it wi' the wumman's box o' claes till the Crowfoot Indians—some ungodly heathen'll be struttin' aboot wi' this meenit," and Ronald sighed as he thought of the departed.

"You're a terror for ancient his-

tory, Ronald," returned his friend. "But about this here singer woman—I was in the church that day, and I saw her bow her head like you say; but I kind o' thought it was beautiful an' fetchin'—anyhow, it's in the Bible, ain't it, about bowin' at—about bowin' then?"

Ronald looked in silence at the inquirer. "Ye wasna brocht up in Scotland, was ye, Ephraim?" he said solemnly at length.

"No," the other answered quickly. "You bet I wasn't—I was fetched up in Illinois—but what's that got to do with the Bible?"

"It's got everythin' to dae wi' it," Ronald replied, producing a veteran pipe from his vest pocket. "Hae ye got ony tobacco on ye?"

"You was raised in Scotland all right," Ephraim murmured as he produced a darksome plug, already sorely wounded. "What's that got

to do with the Bible?" he pursued, his voice unconsciously rising a little as he remarked the longitude and latitude of Ronald's incision on his property.

"It's got this to dae wi't—thank ye, Ephraim," and Ronald handed back the minority as he spoke. "It has this to dae wi't, that yon bit o' the Scriptures is no to be ta'en leeterally—it's a figure o' speech, ye ken; when it says ye're to bow at that Name, it means ye're to bow in yir insides, like a Protestant, and no' to be duckin' yir heid like a poppy—that's the meanin' o't—ye're to bend the knee inside o' ye," and Ronald nodded triumphantly toward his friend.

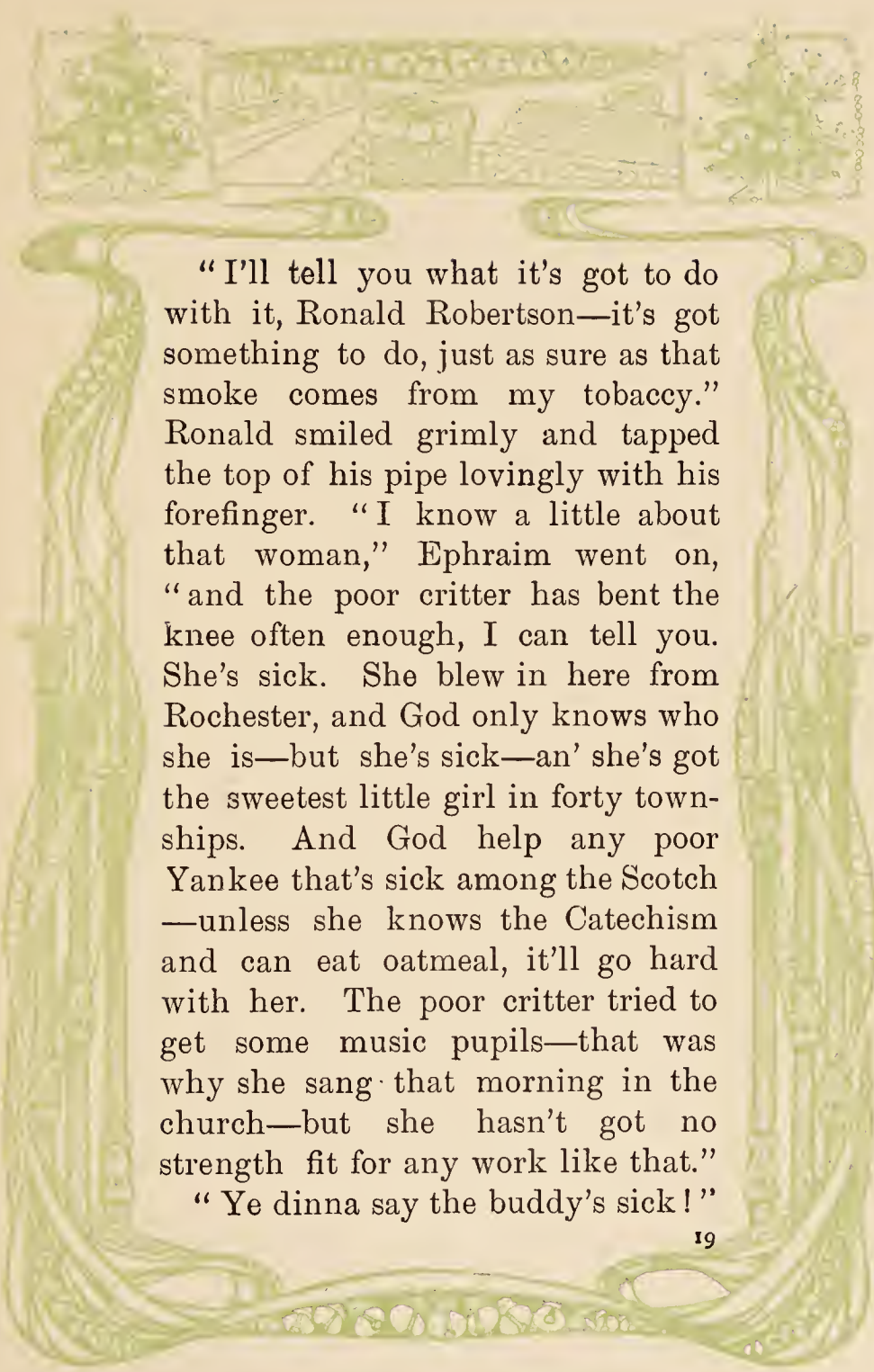
"There isn't any knee inside of you," returned Ephraim doggedly.

Ronald looked at him pityingly. "There's a speeritual knee—that's the kind folks aye bend when they

gie in. That's the kind Queen Mary bendit till John Knox—she didna wallup doon on the floor, nae doot, but she bendit the innard knee for a' that; an' she kent fine ——”

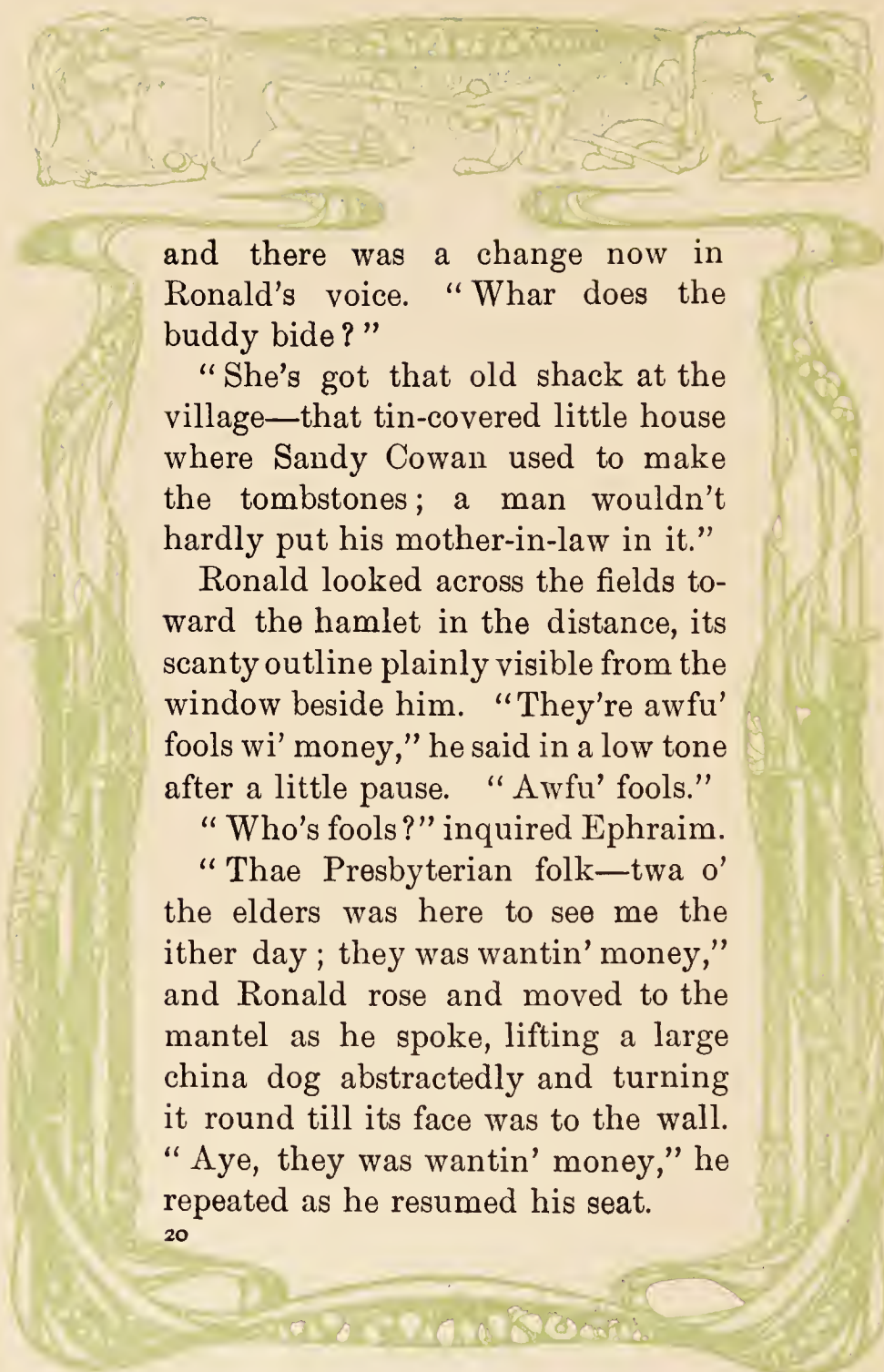
“Oh, I'm gettin' on to you now,” Ephraim interrupted eagerly; “that's the kind of a knee we made you British fellows bend at Yorktown—my father's grandfather heard it crack. I'd sooner duck my head,” he concluded, a faint touch of derision in his tone.

Ronald was on his mettle in a moment. “Wha's at the ancient history noo? And what has Yorktown to dae wi' the solo i' the kirk? Forbye, we was ower busy wi' fechtin' the rest o' the world to bother lang wi' ye—what's that got to dae wi' yon singin'-buddy? Let's stick to the pint, Ephraim,” cried Ronald, emitting great clouds of luxury as he spoke.



“I’ll tell you what it’s got to do with it, Ronald Robertson—it’s got something to do, just as sure as that smoke comes from my tobacco.” Ronald smiled grimly and tapped the top of his pipe lovingly with his forefinger. “I know a little about that woman,” Ephraim went on, “and the poor critter has bent the knee often enough, I can tell you. She’s sick. She blew in here from Rochester, and God only knows who she is—but she’s sick—an’ she’s got the sweetest little girl in forty townships. And God help any poor Yankee that’s sick among the Scotch—unless she knows the Catechism and can eat oatmeal, it’ll go hard with her. The poor critter tried to get some music pupils—that was why she sang that morning in the church—but she hasn’t got no strength fit for any work like that.”

“Ye dinna say the buddy’s sick!”



and there was a change now in Ronald's voice. "Whar does the buddy bide?"

"She's got that old shack at the village—that tin-covered little house where Sandy Cowan used to make the tombstones; a man wouldn't hardly put his mother-in-law in it."

Ronald looked across the fields toward the hamlet in the distance, its scanty outline plainly visible from the window beside him. "They're awfu' fools wi' money," he said in a low tone after a little pause. "Awfu' fools."

"Who's fools?" inquired Ephraim.

"Thae Presbyterian folk—twa o' the elders was here to see me the ither day; they was wantin' money," and Ronald rose and moved to the mantel as he spoke, lifting a large china dog abstractedly and turning it round till its face was to the wall. "Aye, they was wantin' money," he repeated as he resumed his seat.

"What for?" his friend asked pointedly.

"Aye, that's the pint exactly," Ronald said with emphasis; "it was for a Christmas tree they're haverin' aboot; they're gaein' to get a big cedar to litter the Hoose o' God wi'. And they want siller to buy a bauble for ilka bairn i' the kirk—a fine way o' celebratin' oor Saviour's birth, even if they did ken the day," Ronald concluded with fine scorn.

"I heard something about it. What did you tell them, Ronald?"

"I tell't them I was a Presbyterian," answered Ronald in a heightened voice. "I tell't them my faither was a Covenanter, an' he got till his rest wi'oot hardly hearin' tell o' Christmas, or ony o' thae new-fangled schemes for worshippin' Almichty God."

"What did they do?" asked Ephraim.

“ They went awa,” replied Ronald simply.

“ They’ll be back again,” rejoined the other. “ They’re goin’ to put a steeple on the church, an’ I know they’ve got you slated for a couple o’ hundred anyhow—it’s a sad thing to be rich, Ronald.”

“ Steeple! ” Ronald exclaimed contemptuously. “ Steeple—it’s mair o’ their nonsense. They think mair o’ the steeple nor they dae o’ the people, I’m thinkin’. What way wud they want a steeple? There was nae steeple when the sermon on the mount was preachit. It’s juist what I was gaein’ to tell ye—they’re clean daft aboot money, wantin’ to litter up the Hoose o’ God wi’ trees and sic like; and wantin’ a weathercock for the kirk—an’ a’ the time puir stranger buddies lyin’ sick an’ helpless amang us; an’ the elders ——”

But the Scotchman’s speech was

interrupted by a familiar call. "Ronald," a gentle voice was saying, "come here a minute when you're free. I need you just a minute." Ephraim declared he was just on the point of departure anyway, and Ronald bade him a warm farewell as he prepared to answer the ever-welcome summons.





The Wound beneath the Armour



VERY winsome was the face turned toward Ronald as he hurried in the direction of the voice that called him ; but the eyes that looked so intently for his advent seemed unnaturally bright.

“ What’s the matter, Mary ; are ye ailin’ ? ” he cried as he bent low over her, one hand resting tenderly on the slightly dishevelled hair. “ Ye’re no sick, are ye, Mary ? ” a wealth of anxiety in the pleading voice.

“ You take my little ways too

seriously, Ronald," and the sweet face that long ago had seemed to him the fairest type of Canadian beauty was lighted by a reassuring smile. "I was dreaming, dear: I was dreaming about—you know. It was a kind of a day-dream—but I had a kind of a wakening, too, and I felt a little faintness. I'm afraid it's what you would call 'the sair heart' father—just let me lie and rest a little."

Very gently Ronald bended over the earnest face, as his wife, reclining now, slipped her hand into her husband's.

"What did Ephraim have to say?" she asked after a little silence.

"Naethin' of ony importance—we was just haein' a crack."

"Did he say anything about Jessie?"

"Na, I dinna think he did—he was tellin' me aboot that wumman that skirled the solo i' the kirk."

His wife smiled; she had heard often enough about the process thus described.

"Jessie's in New York," she said quietly after a moment's pause.

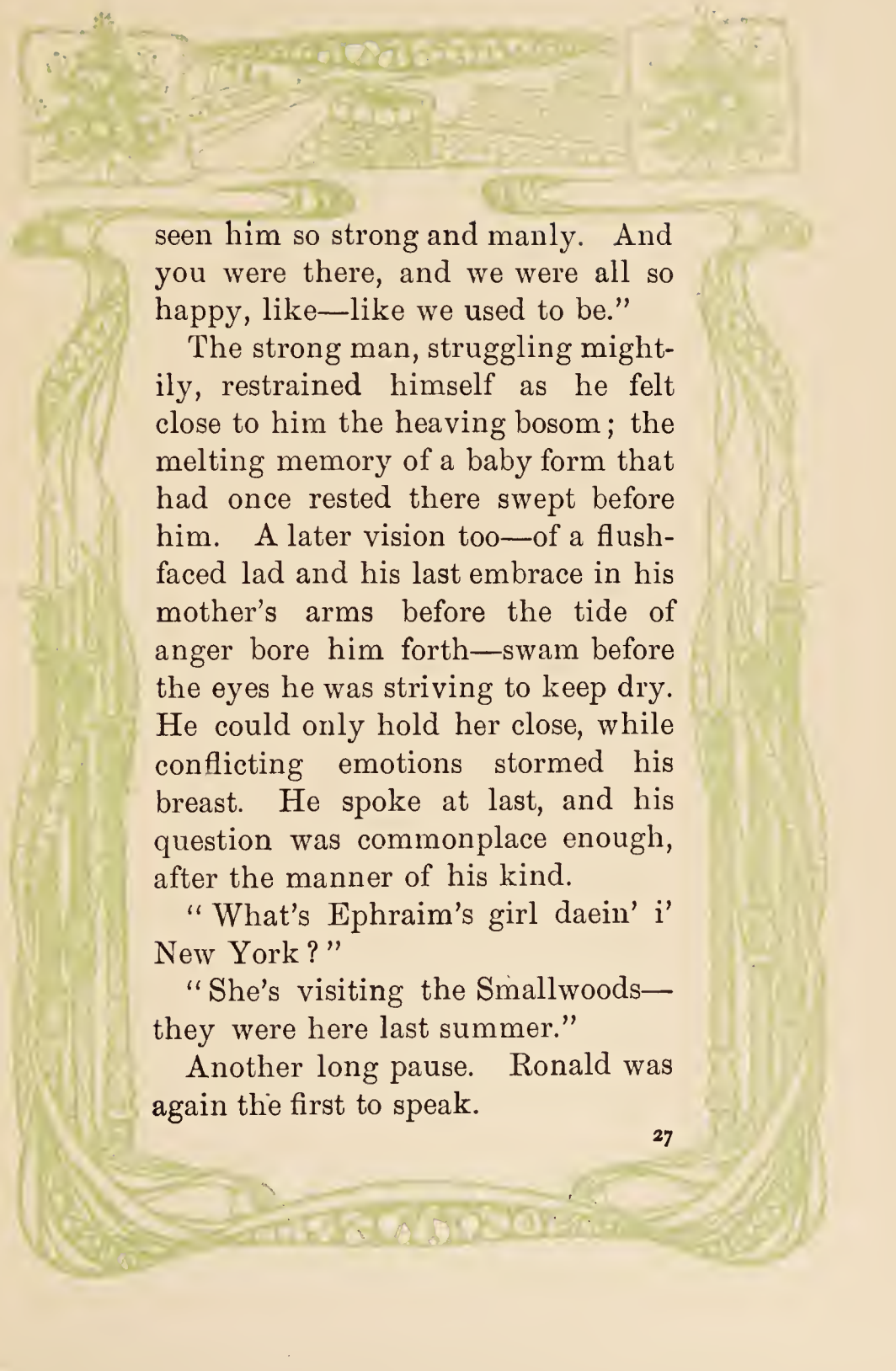
Ronald was silent, a frown of pain flitting across his face. He did not speak.

"Do you suppose she'll see him, Ronald?"

"See wha?" he answered abruptly, his voice still low.

"You know, Ronald, you know," the wife answered, a wave of sadness in her voice. There was a long silence. Then he saw the dark eyes filling up with tears; the gentle arms came slowly up, and drew his head down close beside her, her voice choking:

"Oh, Ronald, I dreamed our boy was home last night—and I held him tight—so tight; like this, Ronald—and I thought I had never



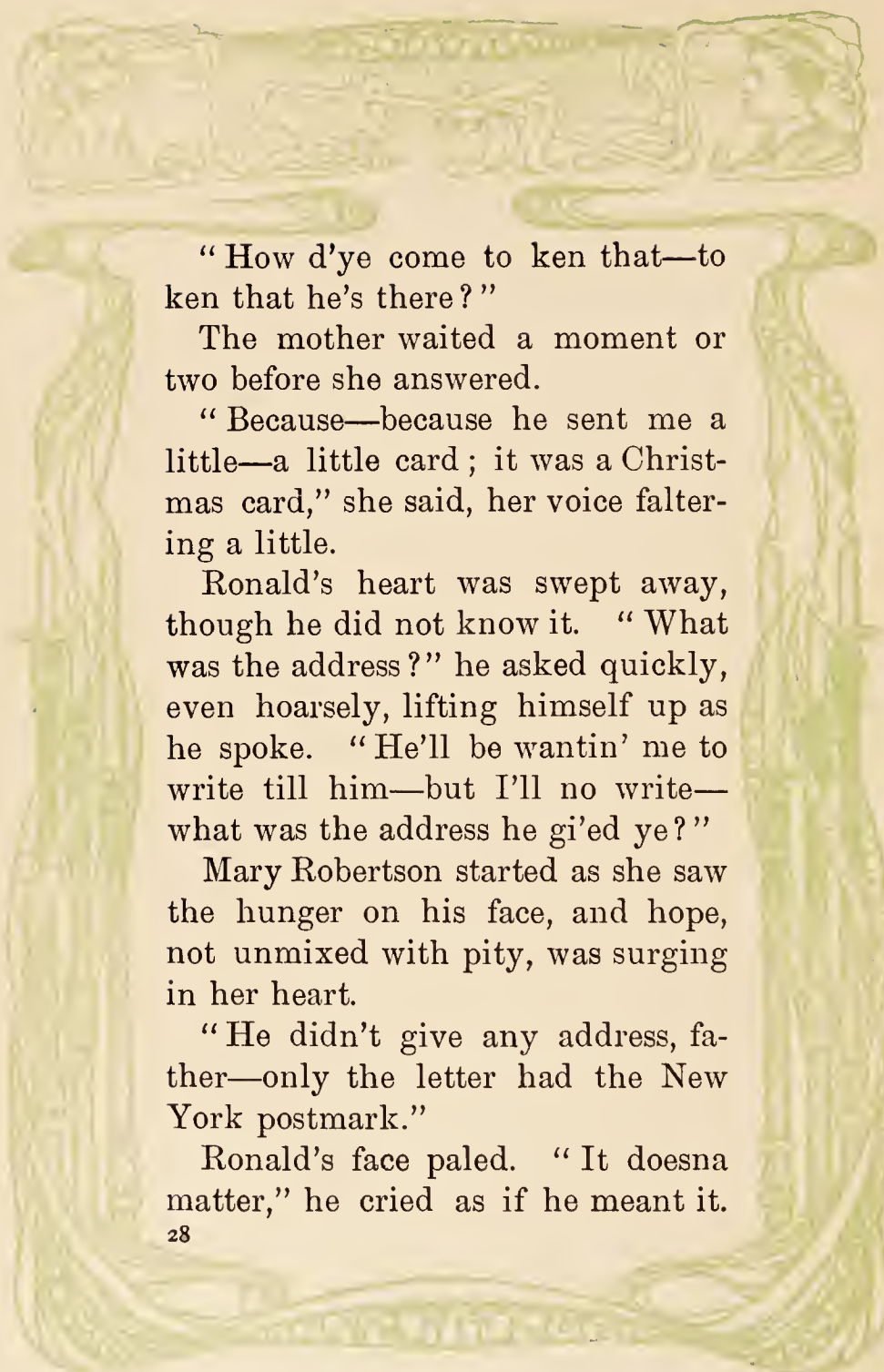
seen him so strong and manly. And you were there, and we were all so happy, like—like we used to be.”

The strong man, struggling mightily, restrained himself as he felt close to him the heaving bosom; the melting memory of a baby form that had once rested there swept before him. A later vision too—of a flush-faced lad and his last embrace in his mother’s arms before the tide of anger bore him forth—swam before the eyes he was striving to keep dry. He could only hold her close, while conflicting emotions stormed his breast. He spoke at last, and his question was commonplace enough, after the manner of his kind.

“What’s Ephraim’s girl daein’ i’ New York?”

“She’s visiting the Smallwoods—they were here last summer.”

Another long pause. Ronald was again the first to speak.



“How d’ye come to ken that—to ken that he’s there?”

The mother waited a moment or two before she answered.

“Because—because he sent me a little—a little card; it was a Christmas card,” she said, her voice faltering a little.

Ronald’s heart was swept away, though he did not know it. “What was the address?” he asked quickly, even hoarsely, lifting himself up as he spoke. “He’ll be wantin’ me to write till him—but I’ll no write—what was the address he gi’ed ye?”

Mary Robertson started as she saw the hunger on his face, and hope, not unmixed with pity, was surging in her heart.

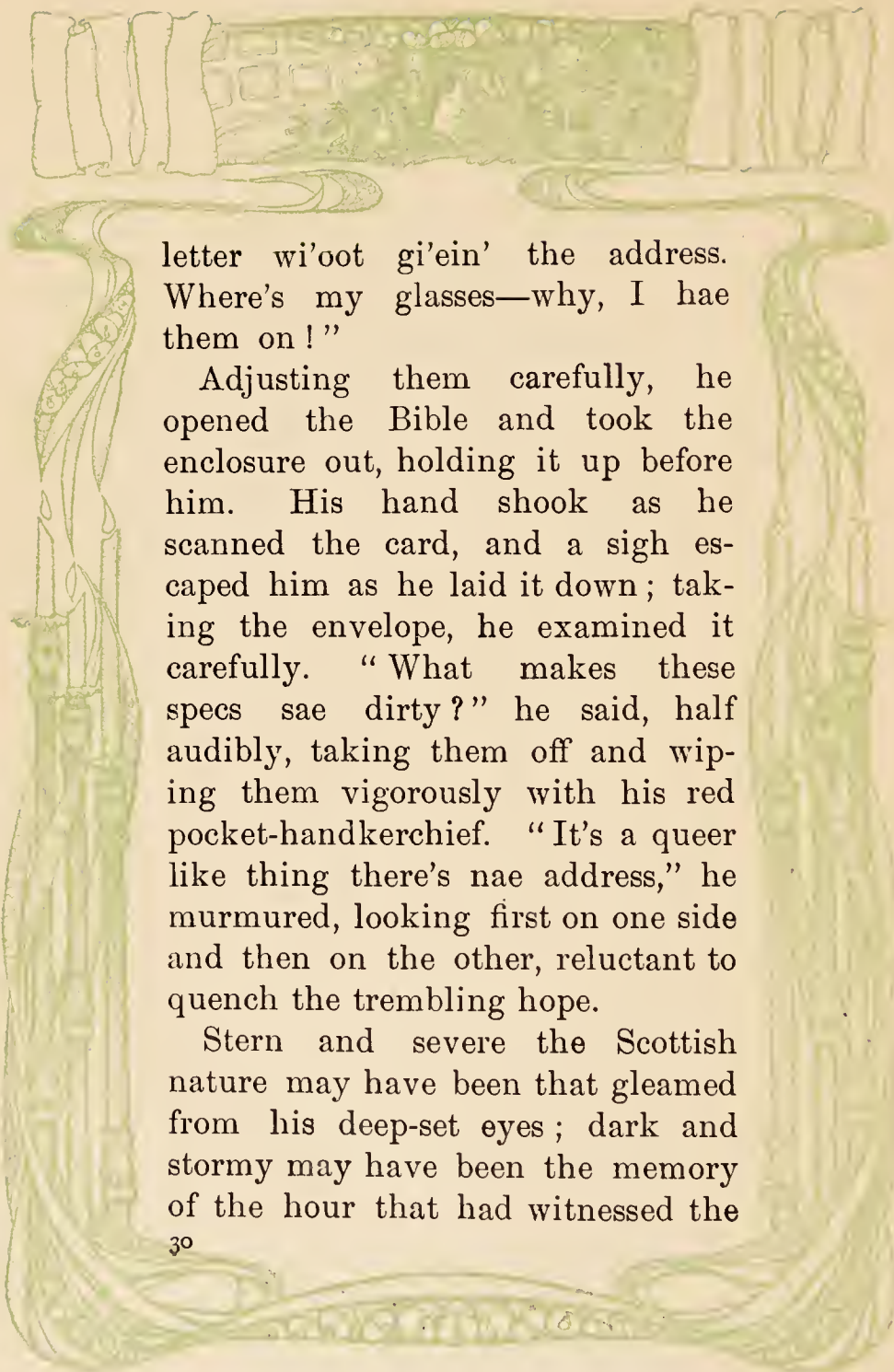
“He didn’t give any address, father—only the letter had the New York postmark.”

Ronald’s face paled. “It doesna matter,” he cried as if he meant it.

“It doesna matter—he ca’d me a liar to my face, an’ naebody wants to ken where he’s bidin’. Where’s the letter, Mary? Ye didna lose it, did ye?” The differing tones contrasted strangely. “Where’s the Christmas caird ye spoke aboot? Strange daein’s for a Christian country; where’s the caird, mither? Ye didna lose it, did ye, Mary?”

His wife pointed to a little table that stood against the wall. “You’ll find it in the Book,” she said. “Did I ever lose anything of Hugh’s?”

Ronald’s face changed, paled slightly, as he heard the now unfamiliar name; and rising quickly he turned toward the table. “There’s sic a thing as justice,” he murmured, “as well as pity. God Himsel’ is juist afore He’s mercifu’. And the yin ye’ve juist mentioned never told me yet he’s sorry—but surely he wudna send a



letter wi'oot gi'ein' the address.
Where's my glasses—why, I hae
them on ! ”

Adjusting them carefully, he opened the Bible and took the enclosure out, holding it up before him. His hand shook as he scanned the card, and a sigh escaped him as he laid it down ; taking the envelope, he examined it carefully. “ What makes these specs sae dirty ? ” he said, half audibly, taking them off and wiping them vigorously with his red pocket-handkerchief. “ It's a queer like thing there's nae address,” he murmured, looking first on one side and then on the other, reluctant to quench the trembling hope.

Stern and severe the Scottish nature may have been that gleamed from his deep-set eyes ; dark and stormy may have been the memory of the hour that had witnessed the

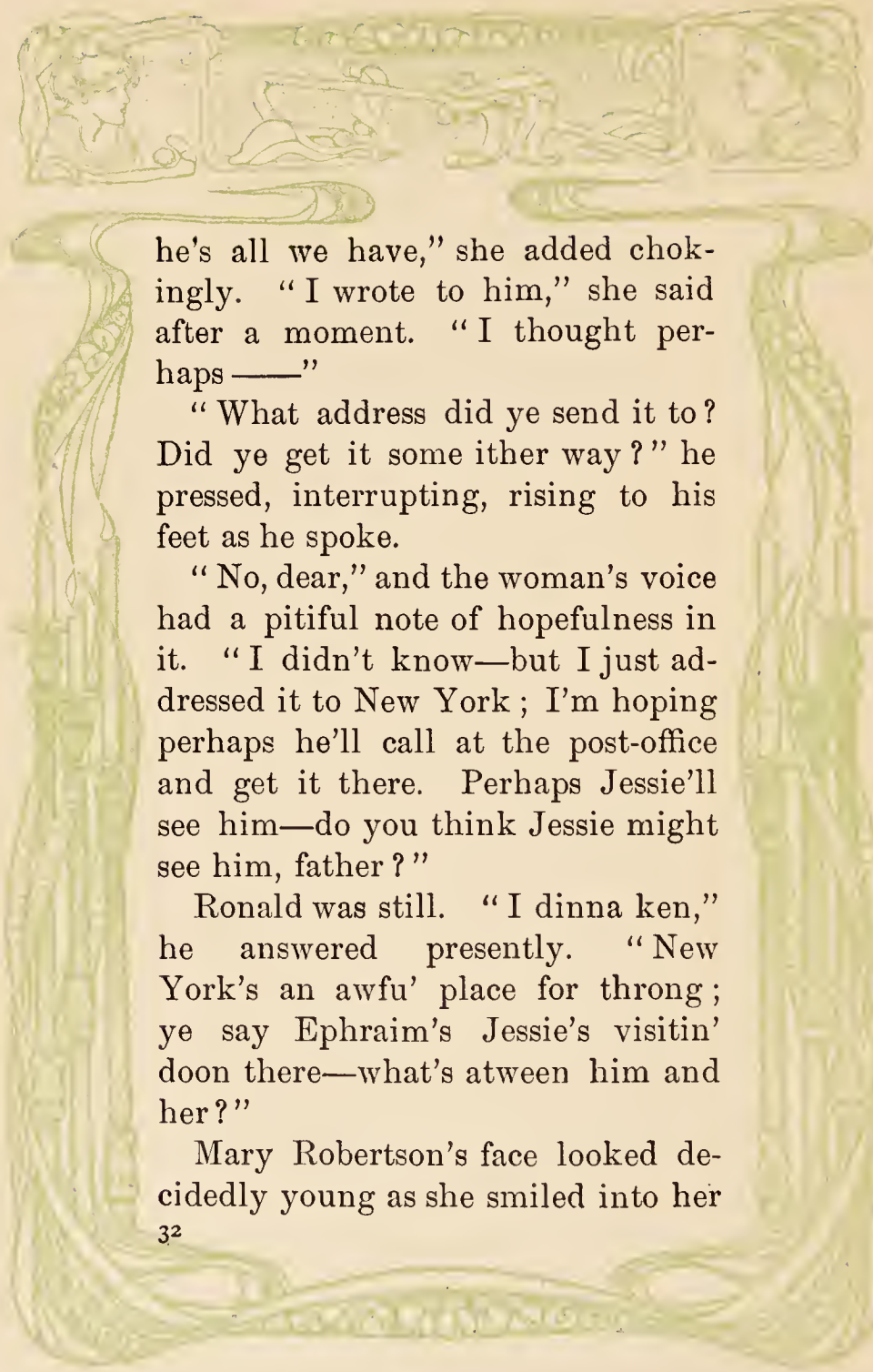
wrathful parting of his only son ; resolute may have been the inner purpose to vindicate what Ronald Robertson called the right ; but eager, and wistful, and even tender, were the eyes that searched the simple missive for the tidings it did not bear.

Silently he restored the card and envelope to their resting place, then turned slowly back and resumed his seat beside his wife.

"I'm so sorry you're disappointed," she began gently, "but I knew it wasn't there."

"I'm no' disappointed," he broke in. "I only wantit to see. Hae ye no' heard me say he's naethin' to me ony mair? It wasna what he did, mind ye—I didna mind a' it cost me—but it was what he said."

"Oh, Ronald, don't," pleaded his wife. "He was so young—and he didn't realize what it meant. And



he's all we have," she added chokingly. "I wrote to him," she said after a moment. "I thought perhaps ——"

"What address did ye send it to? Did ye get it some ither way?" he pressed, interrupting, rising to his feet as he spoke.

"No, dear," and the woman's voice had a pitiful note of hopefulness in it. "I didn't know—but I just addressed it to New York; I'm hoping perhaps he'll call at the post-office and get it there. Perhaps Jessie'll see him—do you think Jessie might see him, father?"

Ronald was still. "I dinna ken," he answered presently. "New York's an awfu' place for throng; ye say Ephraim's Jessie's visitin' doon there—what's atween him and her?"

Mary Robertson's face looked decidedly young as she smiled into her

husband's eyes. "The same thing as used to be between you and me, Ronald, the same old thing," stroking the locks through which the gray was showing.

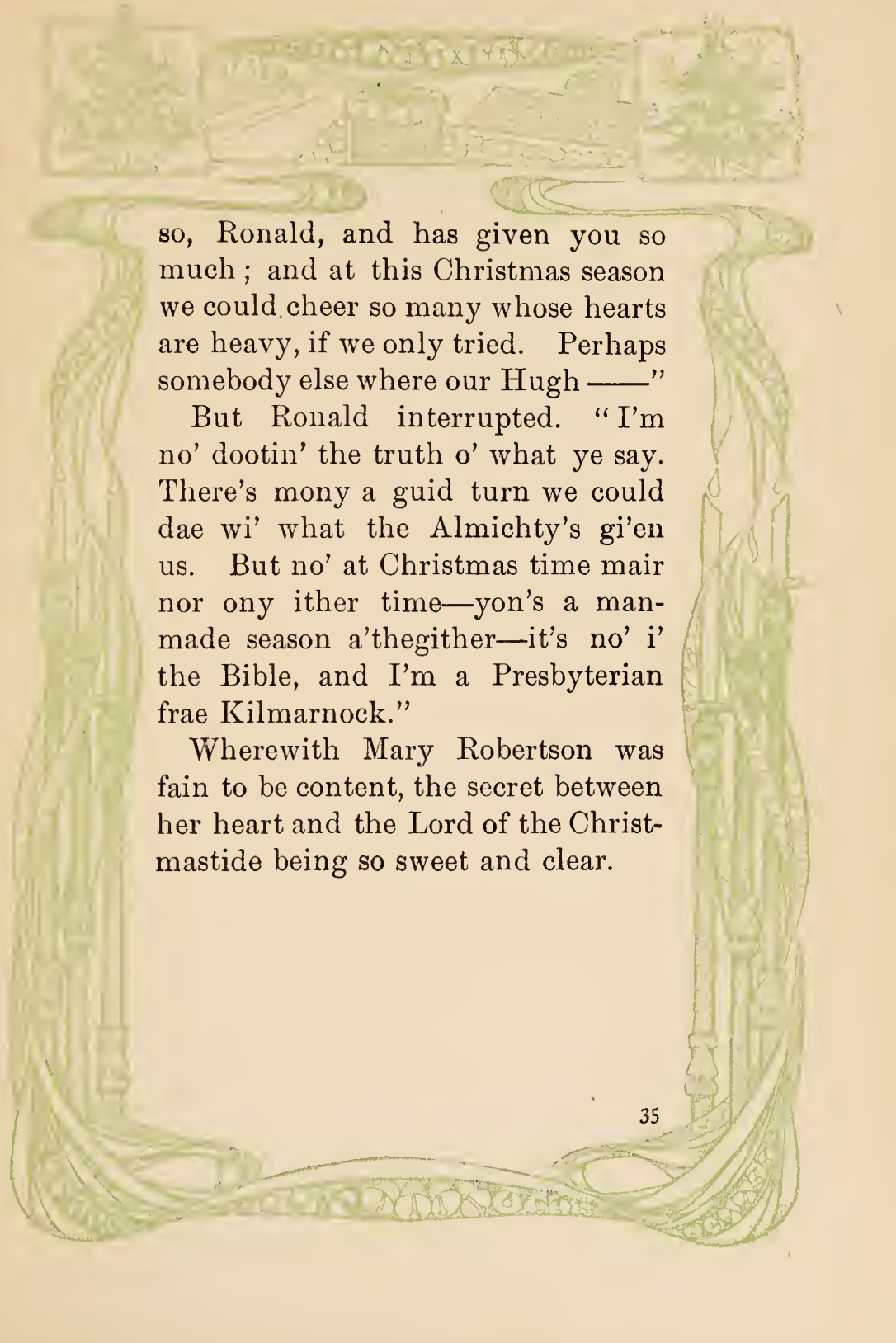
"It's atween us yet, lass," said the man. "They're no gaein' to be married, are they?"

"No, of course not—how could they? I don't know that he has ever spoken love to her at all; but he loves her, I know that. Oh, Ronald," and sudden passion filled the pleading voice, "won't you try to find him and bring him back to us again. I've been thinking—I've been thinking, dear, how lovely it would be now—now at this Christmas time, if we could undo all the past. It's the time—the time, it seems to me, when it ought to be easiest to forgive. Surely that's the chief message of our Saviour's birth, peace and good will!"

She stopped, her eyes carrying on the entreaty of her voice. But disappointment filled them as they rested on her husband's face, unrelenting as it was.

"Dinna ask me mair," he answered, grim firmness in his voice. "Ye ken it canna be—sin maun hae its juist reward, as the Scriptures teach. An', forbye, none o' thae Christmas hav'erins for me—it's no' i' the Bible, an' I dinna gang wi' thae popish ways. An', what's mair, we dinna ken where he bides," he concluded, the tone more tender.

The wife and mother sighed heavily at the words. "No, Ronald, we don't—I would to God we did. But if we can't find our own poor boy, let us try to help somebody else—there are so many who need it so. It seems to me it's an awful thing to have lots of money—and no children to help with it. And God has blessed you



so, Ronald, and has given you so much ; and at this Christmas season we could cheer so many whose hearts are heavy, if we only tried. Perhaps somebody else where our Hugh ——”

But Ronald interrupted. “I’m no’ dootin’ the truth o’ what ye say. There’s mony a guid turn we could dae wi’ what the Almichty’s gi’en us. But no’ at Christmas time mair nor ony ither time—yon’s a man-made season a’thegither—it’s no’ i’ the Bible, and I’m a Presbyterian frae Kilmarnock.”

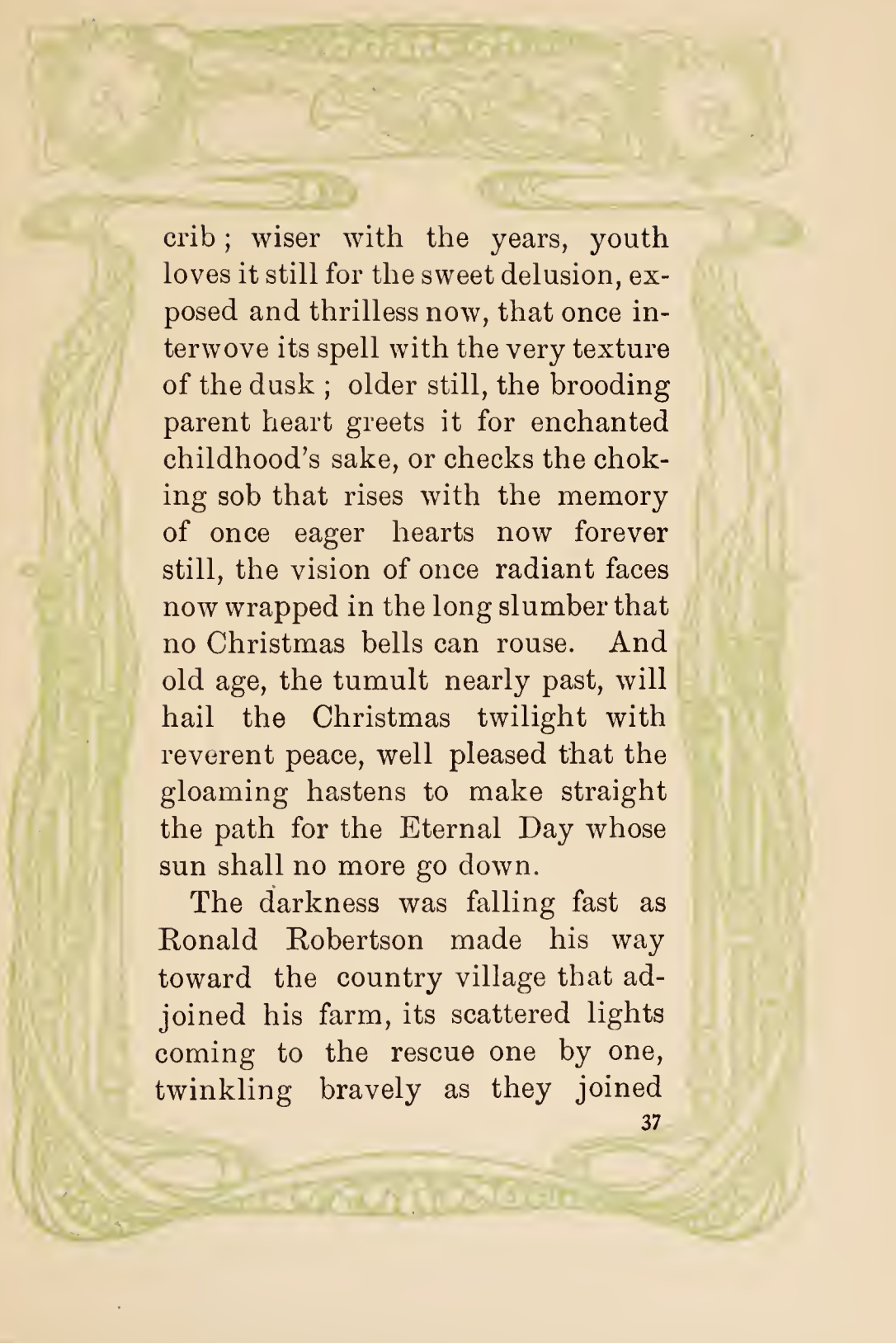
Wherewith Mary Robertson was fain to be content, the secret between her heart and the Lord of the Christmaside being so sweet and clear.



"Twixt the Gloamin' an' the Mirk"

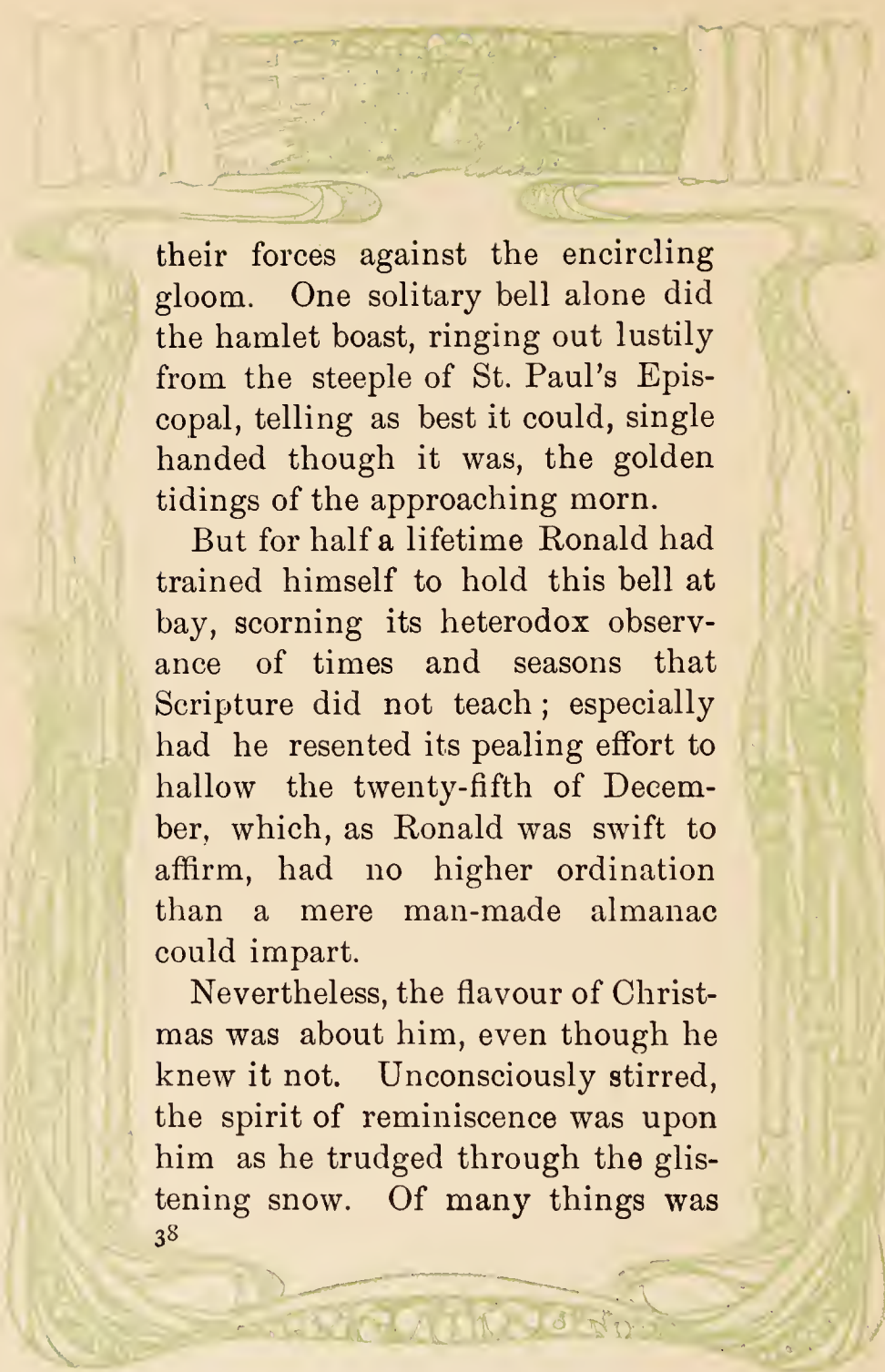


SURELY there is never twilight in all the year like the twilight of Christmas Eve. How ominously it creeps upon the world, portent of the approaching dawn, herald of the throbbing day that is waiting at the door. But in what different fashions is it greeted by those to whom it brings its differing message! Childhood, rapture-bound, hails it as the hem of the garment in which the Mystic Messenger of the night, treasure-laden, shall creep to childhood's



crib ; wiser with the years, youth loves it still for the sweet delusion, exposed and thrilless now, that once interwove its spell with the very texture of the dusk ; older still, the brooding parent heart greets it for enchanted childhood's sake, or checks the choking sob that rises with the memory of once eager hearts now forever still, the vision of once radiant faces now wrapped in the long slumber that no Christmas bells can rouse. And old age, the tumult nearly past, will hail the Christmas twilight with reverent peace, well pleased that the gloaming hastens to make straight the path for the Eternal Day whose sun shall no more go down.

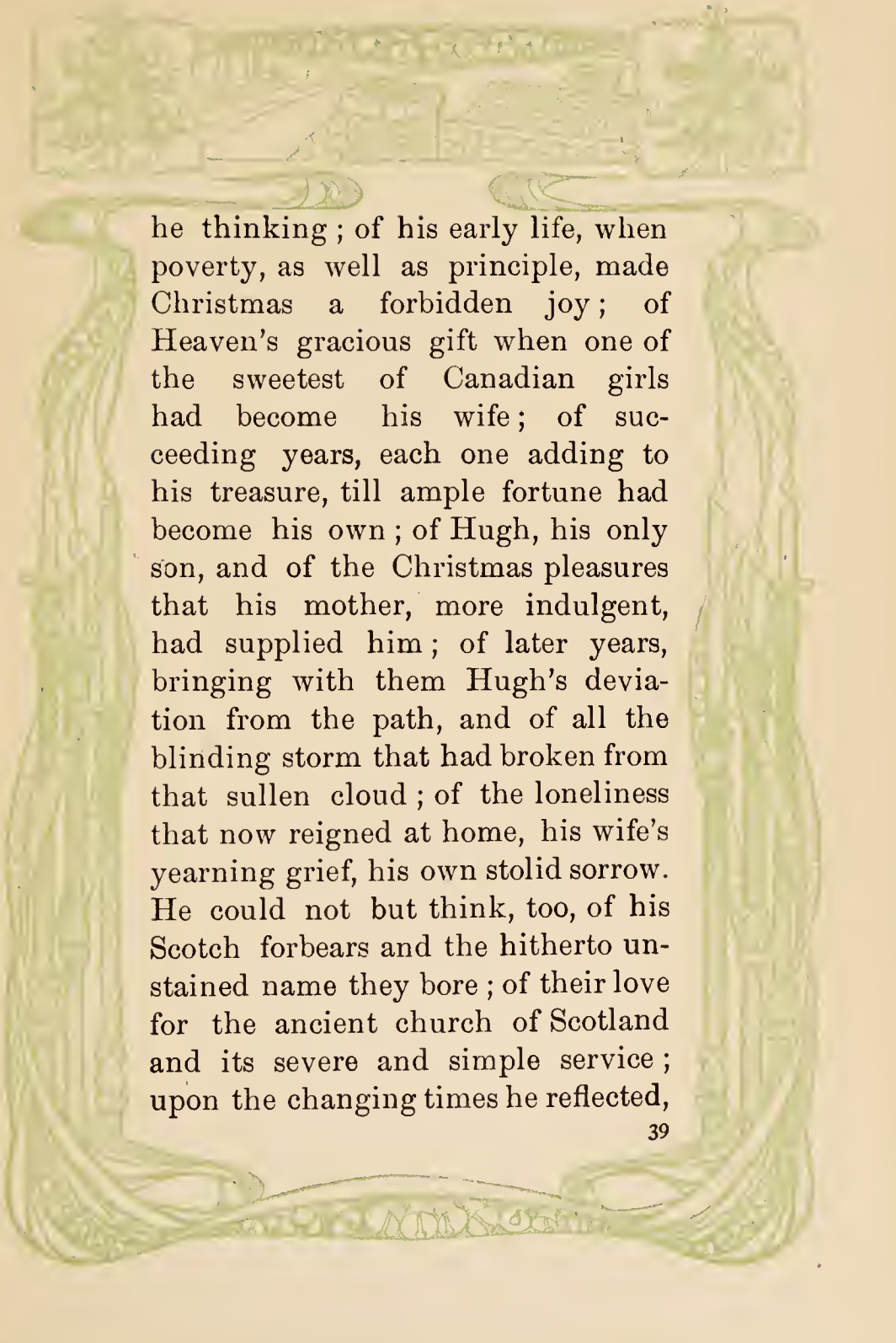
The darkness was falling fast as Ronald Robertson made his way toward the country village that adjoined his farm, its scattered lights coming to the rescue one by one, twinkling bravely as they joined



their forces against the encircling gloom. One solitary bell alone did the hamlet boast, ringing out lustily from the steeple of St. Paul's Episcopal, telling as best it could, single handed though it was, the golden tidings of the approaching morn.

But for half a lifetime Ronald had trained himself to hold this bell at bay, scorning its heterodox observance of times and seasons that Scripture did not teach; especially had he resented its pealing effort to hallow the twenty-fifth of December, which, as Ronald was swift to affirm, had no higher ordination than a mere man-made almanac could impart.

Nevertheless, the flavour of Christmas was about him, even though he knew it not. Unconsciously stirred, the spirit of reminiscence was upon him as he trudged through the glistening snow. Of many things was



he thinking ; of his early life, when poverty, as well as principle, made Christmas a forbidden joy ; of Heaven's gracious gift when one of the sweetest of Canadian girls had become his wife ; of succeeding years, each one adding to his treasure, till ample fortune had become his own ; of Hugh, his only son, and of the Christmas pleasures that his mother, more indulgent, had supplied him ; of later years, bringing with them Hugh's deviation from the path, and of all the blinding storm that had broken from that sullen cloud ; of the loneliness that now reigned at home, his wife's yearning grief, his own stolid sorrow. He could not but think, too, of his Scotch forbears and the hitherto unstained name they bore ; of their love for the ancient church of Scotland and its severe and simple service ; upon the changing times he reflected,

too, and the flippant mummeries that the giddy age dignified by the name of Progress.

His mind reverted to the talk he had had with Ephraim, and, in consequence, to the innovations that had grieved his Presbyterian spirit and driven him from the kirk his father died in blessing. Thus mentally absorbed, Ronald did not notice the approach of a familiar figure till he was almost under the tower of St. Paul's. A cheery voice arrested him.

"Isn't that elegant, Ronald?"

"What's that?" cried Ronald, his face brightening as he saw the other's through the dusk. "What's that ye're sayin', Ephraim?"

"Isn't that slick?" Ephraim repeated, varying the adjective alone. "Isn't that elegant for Christmas music?" pointing upward to the church steeple as he spoke; "it

makes a fellow think of the angelic choir," he concluded fervidly.

"I canna hear what ye're sayin'—yon ungodly bell's makin' sic a clatter; what's it bellerin' aboot? It's no' the Sabbath Day."

"The Episcopals are havin' church," roared Ephraim. "Mebbe they don't have it till the mornin'—this is a kind of a preliminary canter."

"Service for a Christmas mornin'!" said Ronald pityingly, his voice exalted high; "they'll be haein' the Pope to preach till them, nae doot—an' mebbe he'll hae a wee bit stockin' hangin' roon' his neck, an' a swamp-cedar ower his arm." This last was delivered with as much scorn as was consistent with the effort of shouting into Ephraim's ear.

"Come on a bit ahead; this would deafen a man," said his auditor, moving onward as he spoke. Ronald

followed, and soon the two men were beyond the sound-belt.

"Where you bound for?" Ephraim asked.

"I'm gaein' to the doctor's; I want to hae a crack wi' him aboot the wife."

"How is she?" asked the other.

"Oh, she's no' sae bad—she's fine, but she has thae bits o' tired turns. I'm feart she's frettin' a deal."

"What's she frettin' about, if it's a fair question?"

"Oh, I guess ye ken; there's but yin thing her and me has to fash oorsels aboot—I'm thinkin' ye ken what it is."

"The boy?" Ephraim ventured after a pause.

"Aye, it's the boy—the laddie, his mither ca's him."

"That's like a mother—a Scotch mother," remarked Ephraim. "And what do you call him yourself?"

Ronald waited a minute. "I ca' him—the yin that's awa," he said presently.

A considerable silence followed. Ephraim broke it abruptly.

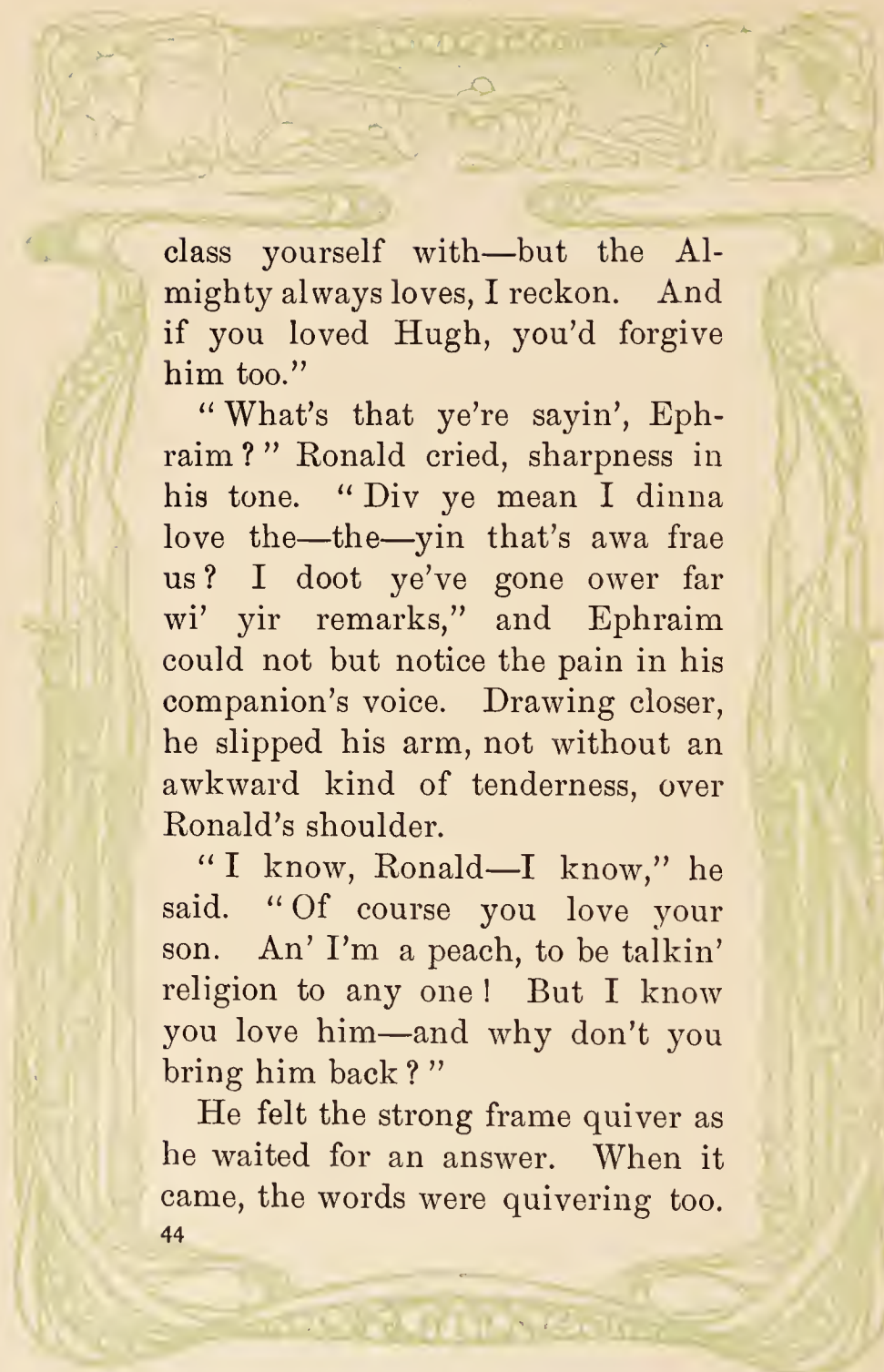
"You're wrong, Ronnie," he began solemnly.

"Wrang," exclaimed the other. "What way am I wrang?"

"About Hugh. The lad made a mistake, I know—but you set up to be a Christian; an' you ought to forgive him and bring him back. It's breakin' his mother's heart; an' what's the use o' talkin' about God forgivin' folks, if you don't try your hand at the business yourself?"

"Aye, that's a' verra weel," interrupted Ronald. "But ye ken there's sic a thing as justice—th' Almichty Himsel' doesna forgive wi'oot certain conditions."

"Sure," replied the other. "I can't help admirin' the folks you



class yourself with—but the Almighty always loves, I reckon. And if you loved Hugh, you'd forgive him too."

"What's that ye're sayin', Ephraim?" Ronald cried, sharpness in his tone. "Div ye mean I dinna love the—the—yin that's awa frae us? I doot ye've gone ower far wi' yir remarks," and Ephraim could not but notice the pain in his companion's voice. Drawing closer, he slipped his arm, not without an awkward kind of tenderness, over Ronald's shoulder.

"I know, Ronald—I know," he said. "Of course you love your son. An' I'm a peach, to be talkin' religion to any one! But I know you love him—and why don't you bring him back?"

He felt the strong frame quiver as he waited for an answer. When it came, the words were quivering too.

“Aye, I love him—he’s his mother’s laddie, onyway; but there’s sic a thing as justice—an’ forbye,” his eyes glowing through the dusk with strong and wistful light, “forbye, we dinna ken where he bides. Here we are—this is the doctor’s hoose,” and he turned in quickly at the half-open gate.

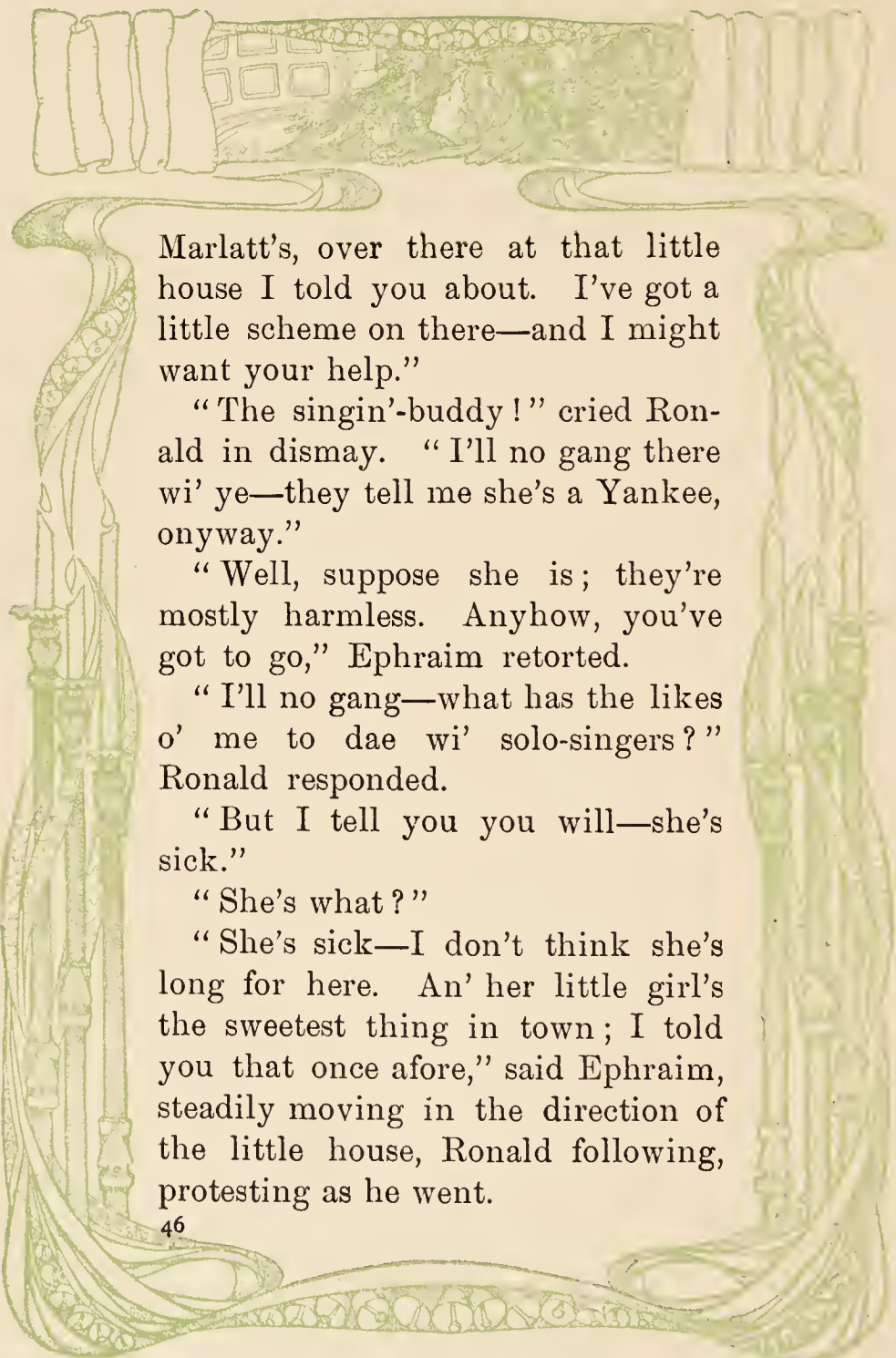
But his errand was fruitless; the doctor was absent on a prolonged visit to the country.

“The lassie says he’ll no’ be back till late—I’ll gang hame again,” said Ronald, preparing to retrace his steps.

“Wait a minute,” interjected Ephraim. “I’ve got a little business on hand myself; you just come along with me—mebbe I’ll need you.”

“Where micht ye be gaein’?”

“Well, I’ll tell you,” replied Ephraim. “I’m goin’ to that singin’-woman, as you call her—to Mrs.



Marlatt's, over there at that little house I told you about. I've got a little scheme on there—and I might want your help."

"The singin'-buddy!" cried Ronald in dismay. "I'll no gang there wi' ye—they tell me she's a Yankee, onyway."

"Well, suppose she is; they're mostly harmless. Anyhow, you've got to go," Ephraim retorted.

"I'll no gang—what has the likes o' me to dae wi' solo-singers?" Ronald responded.

"But I tell you you will—she's sick."

"She's what?"

"She's sick—I don't think she's long for here. An' her little girl's the sweetest thing in town; I told you that once afore," said Ephraim, steadily moving in the direction of the little house, Ronald following, protesting as he went.

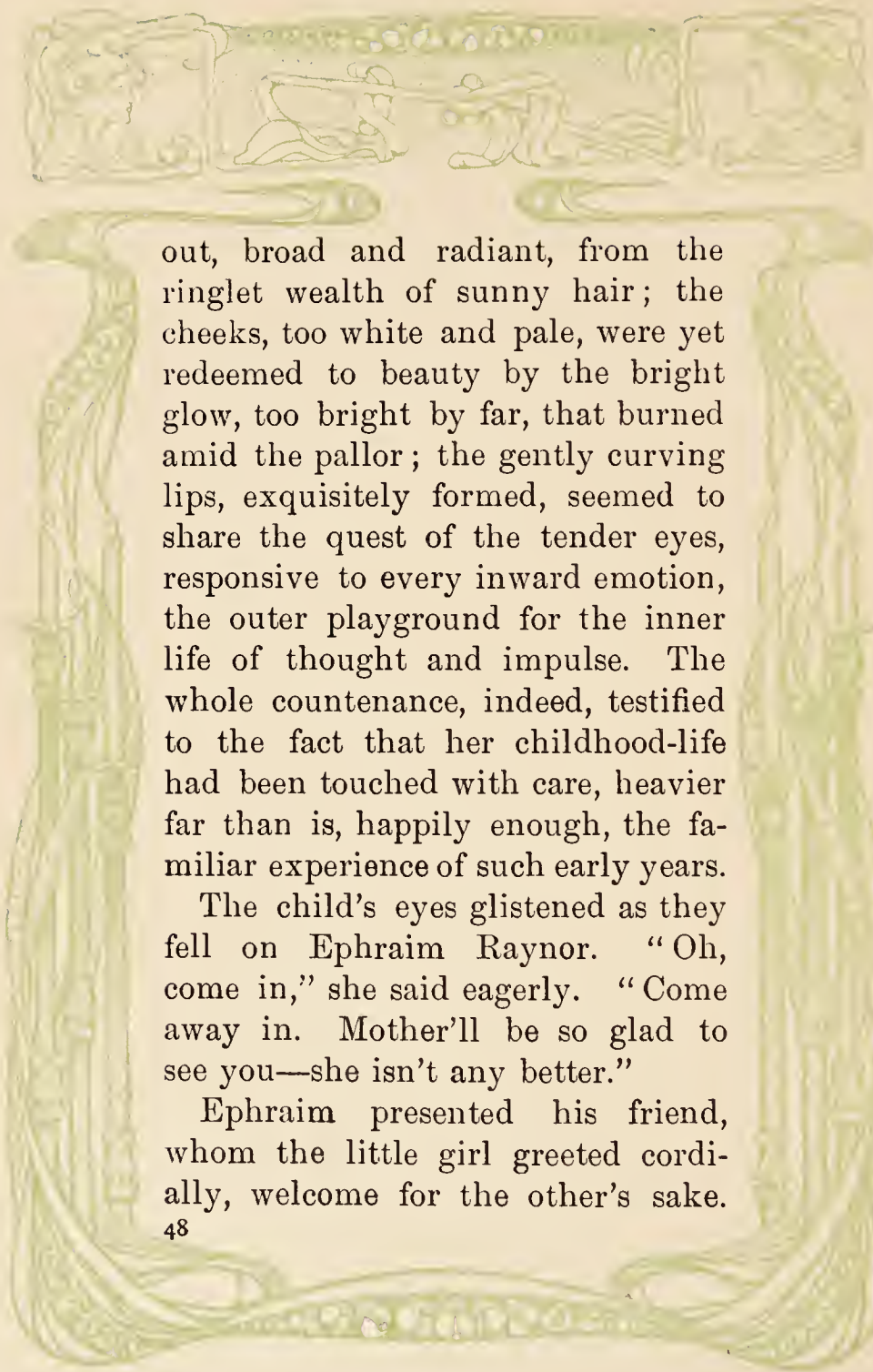
“What kind o’ a scheme, as ye ca’ it, hae ye got on hand?”

“Oh, just a little celebration—inno-
cent as milk,” Ephraim exclaimed.

“Some o’ thae Christmas flum-
meries?” inquired Ronald, suspi-
ciously.

“Wait an’ see for yourself—here’s
the house now,” and Ephraim turned
toward the door, his arm by this
time interlocked with his friend’s.

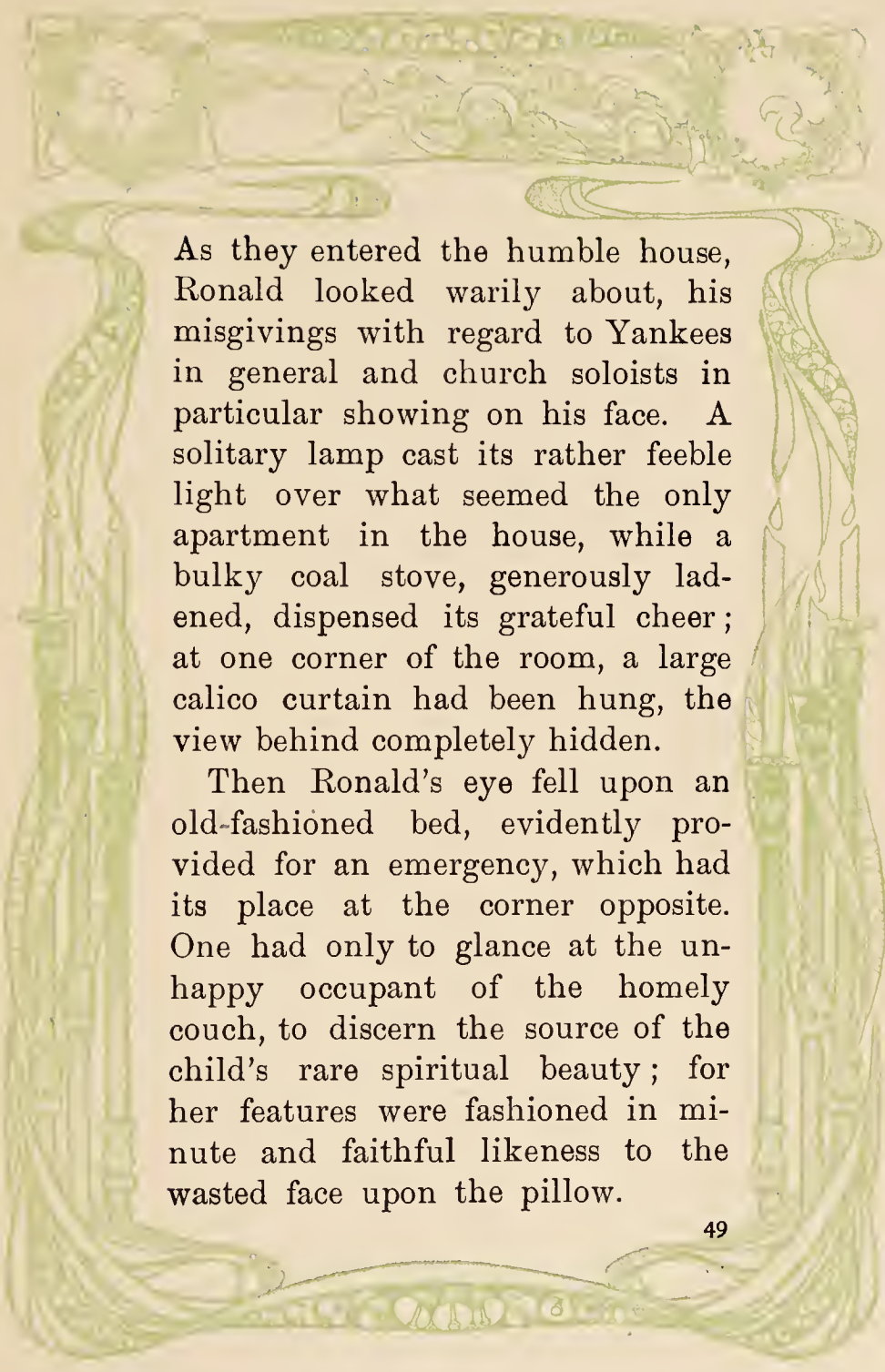
He knocked gently, and in a
moment the door was opened by a
child of somewhere about eight years
of age. Beautiful to look upon she
certainly was. The childish face,
bright with the light of intelligence,
was full of simple earnestness; large
glowing eyes, eloquent of trustful-
ness and of hope as yet unbruised,
bespoke the wistful longing of an
eager soul that had still gazed with
wondering sadness at life’s encircling
mystery. The white forehead stood



out, broad and radiant, from the ringlet wealth of sunny hair; the cheeks, too white and pale, were yet redeemed to beauty by the bright glow, too bright by far, that burned amid the pallor; the gently curving lips, exquisitely formed, seemed to share the quest of the tender eyes, responsive to every inward emotion, the outer playground for the inner life of thought and impulse. The whole countenance, indeed, testified to the fact that her childhood-life had been touched with care, heavier far than is, happily enough, the familiar experience of such early years.

The child's eyes glistened as they fell on Ephraim Raynor. "Oh, come in," she said eagerly. "Come away in. Mother'll be so glad to see you—she isn't any better."

Ephraim presented his friend, whom the little girl greeted cordially, welcome for the other's sake.



As they entered the humble house, Ronald looked warily about, his misgivings with regard to Yankees in general and church soloists in particular showing on his face. A solitary lamp cast its rather feeble light over what seemed the only apartment in the house, while a bulky coal stove, generously laden, dispensed its grateful cheer; at one corner of the room, a large calico curtain had been hung, the view behind completely hidden.

Then Ronald's eye fell upon an old-fashioned bed, evidently provided for an emergency, which had its place at the corner opposite. One had only to glance at the unhappy occupant of the homely couch, to discern the source of the child's rare spiritual beauty; for her features were fashioned in minute and faithful likeness to the wasted face upon the pillow.



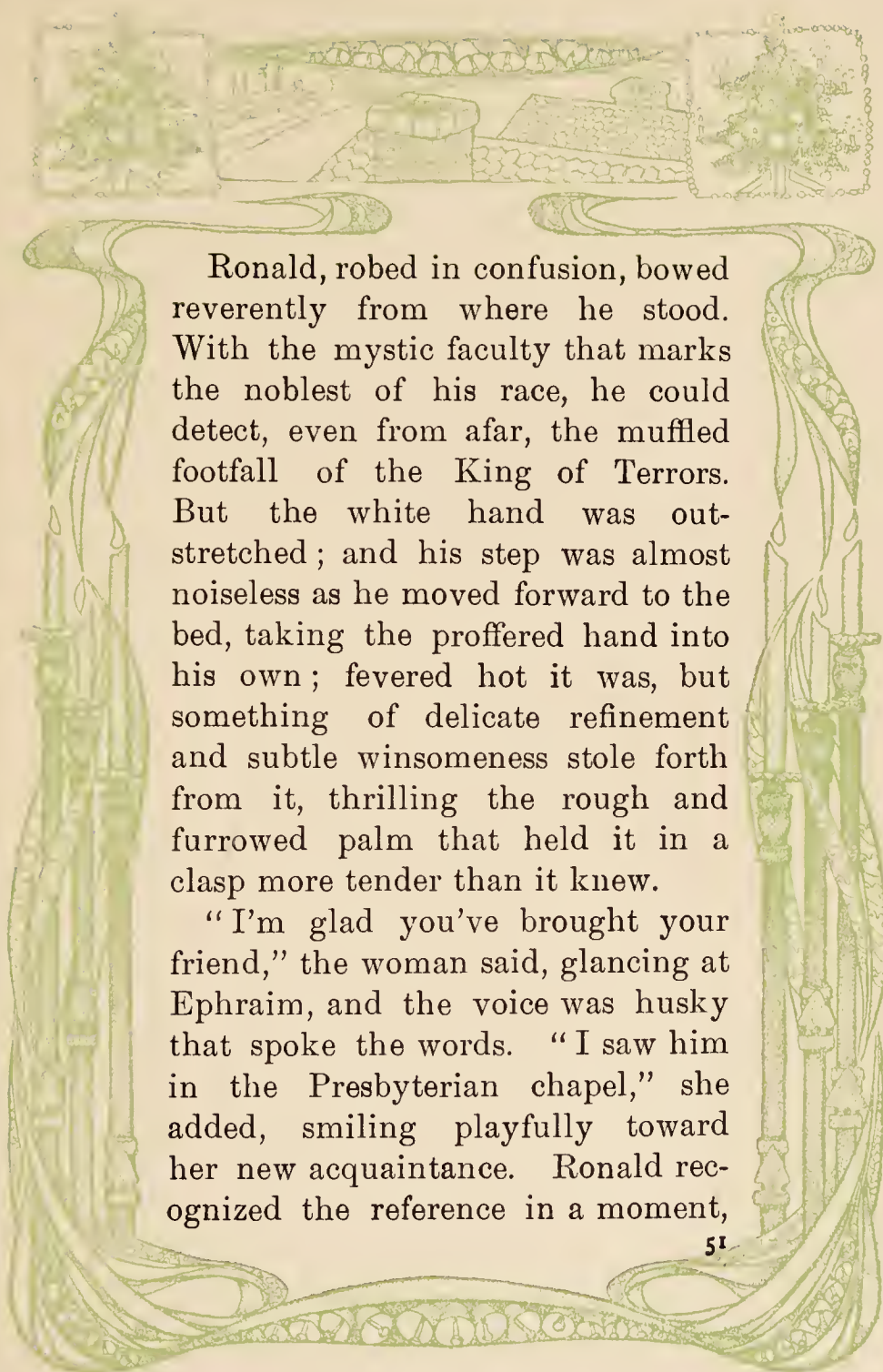
The Pious Perjury



TARTLED by what he saw, Ronald stopped, glancing backward toward the door that had just closed behind him.

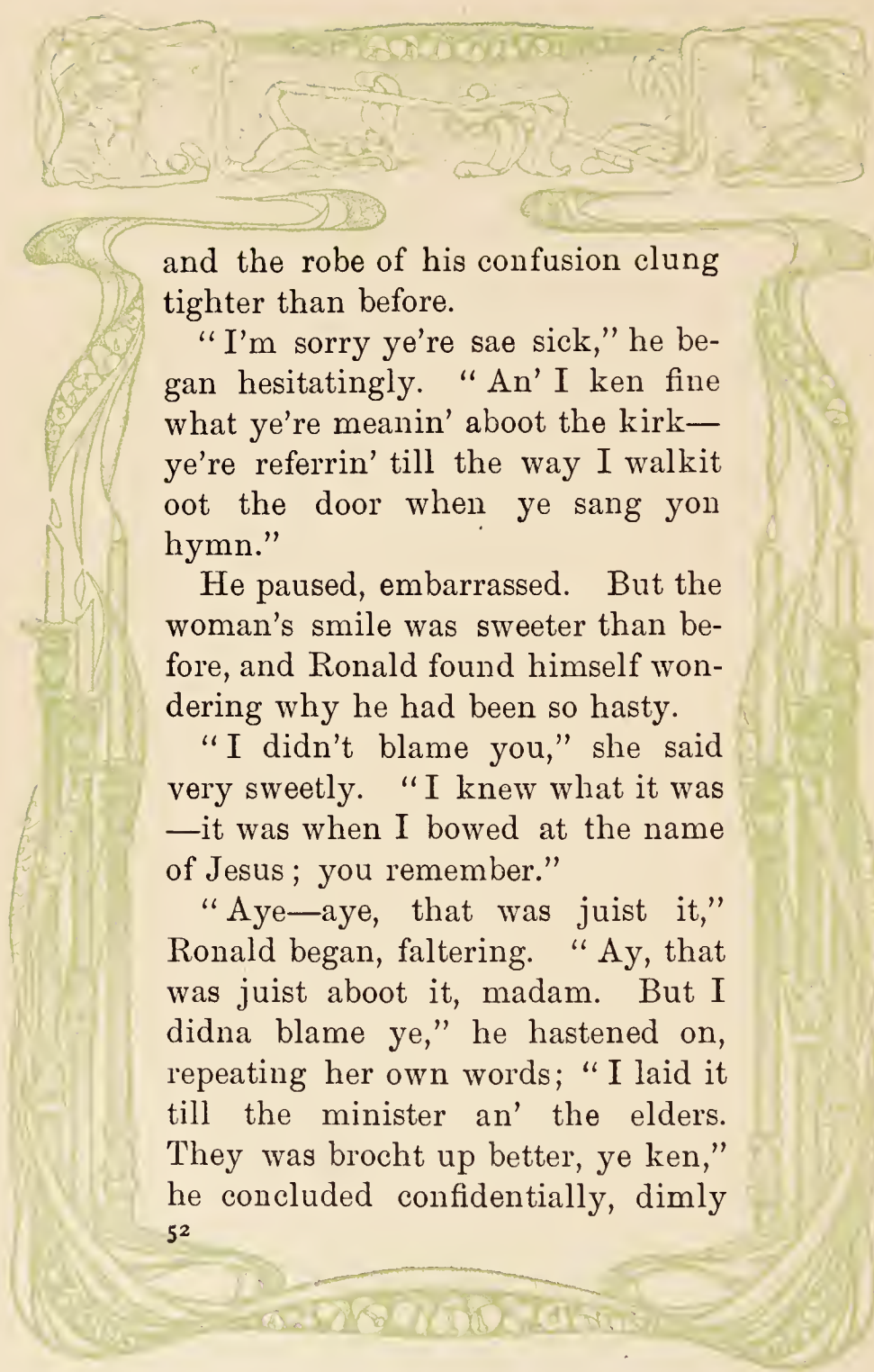
But his guide and counsellor and friend, remarking the hesitation, cut off all possible retreat.

"Mrs. Marlatt," he said, withdrawing his hand from the pallid palm upon the counterpane, "I've brought a friend to see you. This is Mr. Robertson, Ronald Robertson—you've heard me speak of him. Come on, Ronald."



Ronald, robed in confusion, bowed reverently from where he stood. With the mystic faculty that marks the noblest of his race, he could detect, even from afar, the muffled footfall of the King of Terrors. But the white hand was outstretched; and his step was almost noiseless as he moved forward to the bed, taking the proffered hand into his own; fevered hot it was, but something of delicate refinement and subtle winsomeness stole forth from it, thrilling the rough and furrowed palm that held it in a clasp more tender than it knew.

"I'm glad you've brought your friend," the woman said, glancing at Ephraim, and the voice was husky that spoke the words. "I saw him in the Presbyterian chapel," she added, smiling playfully toward her new acquaintance. Ronald recognized the reference in a moment,



and the robe of his confusion clung tighter than before.

"I'm sorry ye're sae sick," he began hesitatingly. "An' I ken fine what ye're meanin' aboot the kirk—ye're referrin' till the way I walkit oot the door when ye sang yon hymn."

He paused, embarrassed. But the woman's smile was sweeter than before, and Ronald found himself wondering why he had been so hasty.

"I didn't blame you," she said very sweetly. "I knew what it was—it was when I bowed at the name of Jesus; you remember."

"Aye—aye, that was juist it," Ronald began, faltering. "Ay, that was juist aboot it, madam. But I didna blame ye," he hastened on, repeating her own words; "I laid it till the minister an' the elders. They was brocht up better, ye ken," he concluded confidentially, dimly

fearful that he was floundering sadly.

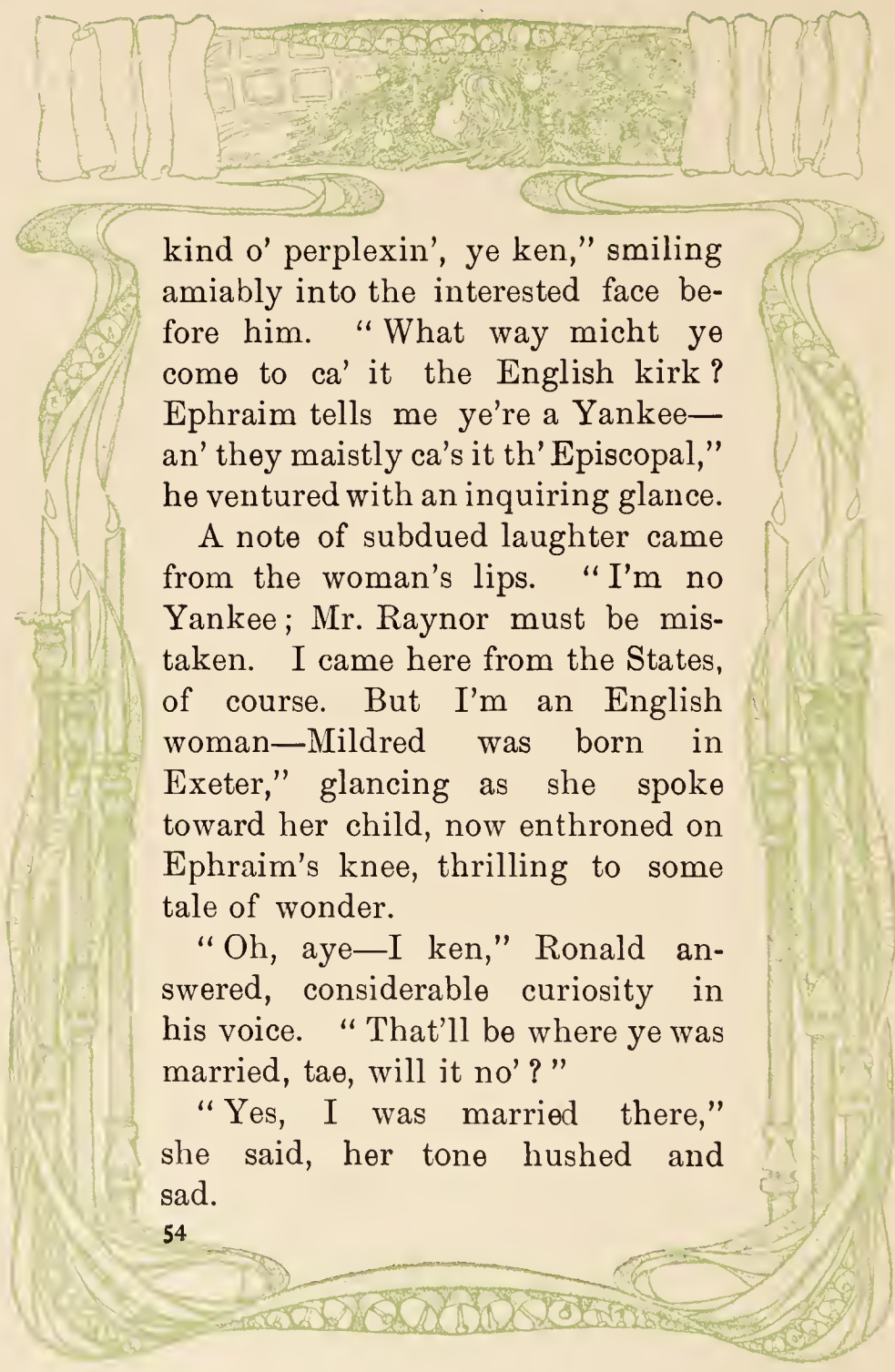
Strange are the features of merriment when upon the human face they mingle with the signature of death. But nothing less than merriment it was that broke from eye and lip as Ronald's auditor gazed into the strong set face of her visitor, and marked the stern intensity of his voice. Unfamiliar with his kind, the type was new and highly interesting.

"I sang it the way I used to in the church at home," she said at length. "It's a church hymn, I think."

"What church?" Ronald asked abruptly.

"Oh—the Church, I said; the Church of England, of course."

"Oh, aye," Ronald responded significantly. "I thoct mebbe ye was meanin' the Kirk o' Scotland—it's

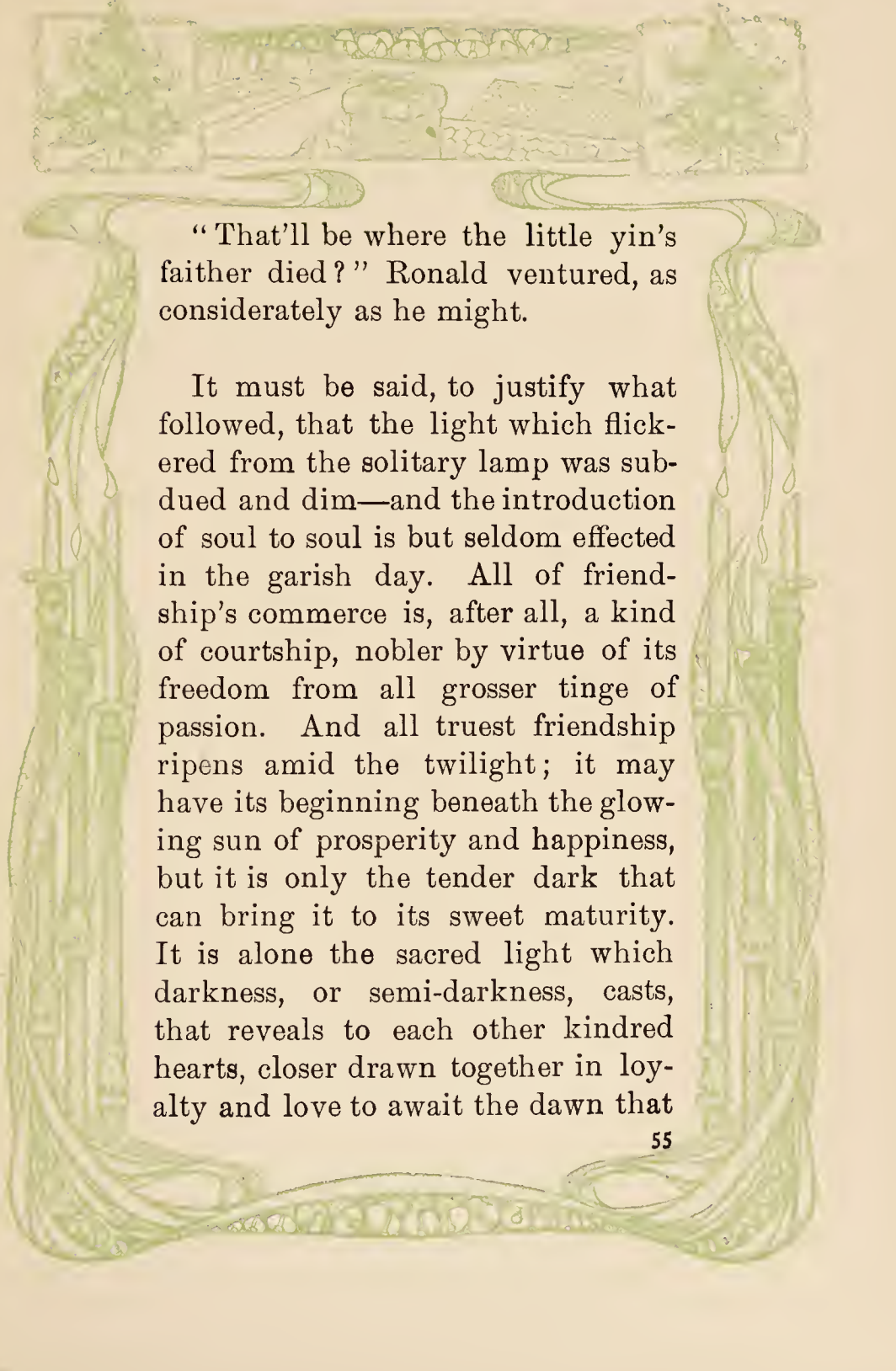


kind o' perplexin', ye ken," smiling amiably into the interested face before him. "What way might ye come to ca' it the English kirk? Ephraim tells me ye're a Yankee—an' they maistly ca's it th' Episcopal," he ventured with an inquiring glance.

A note of subdued laughter came from the woman's lips. "I'm no Yankee; Mr. Raynor must be mistaken. I came here from the States, of course. But I'm an English woman—Mildred was born in Exeter," glancing as she spoke toward her child, now enthroned on Ephraim's knee, thrilling to some tale of wonder.

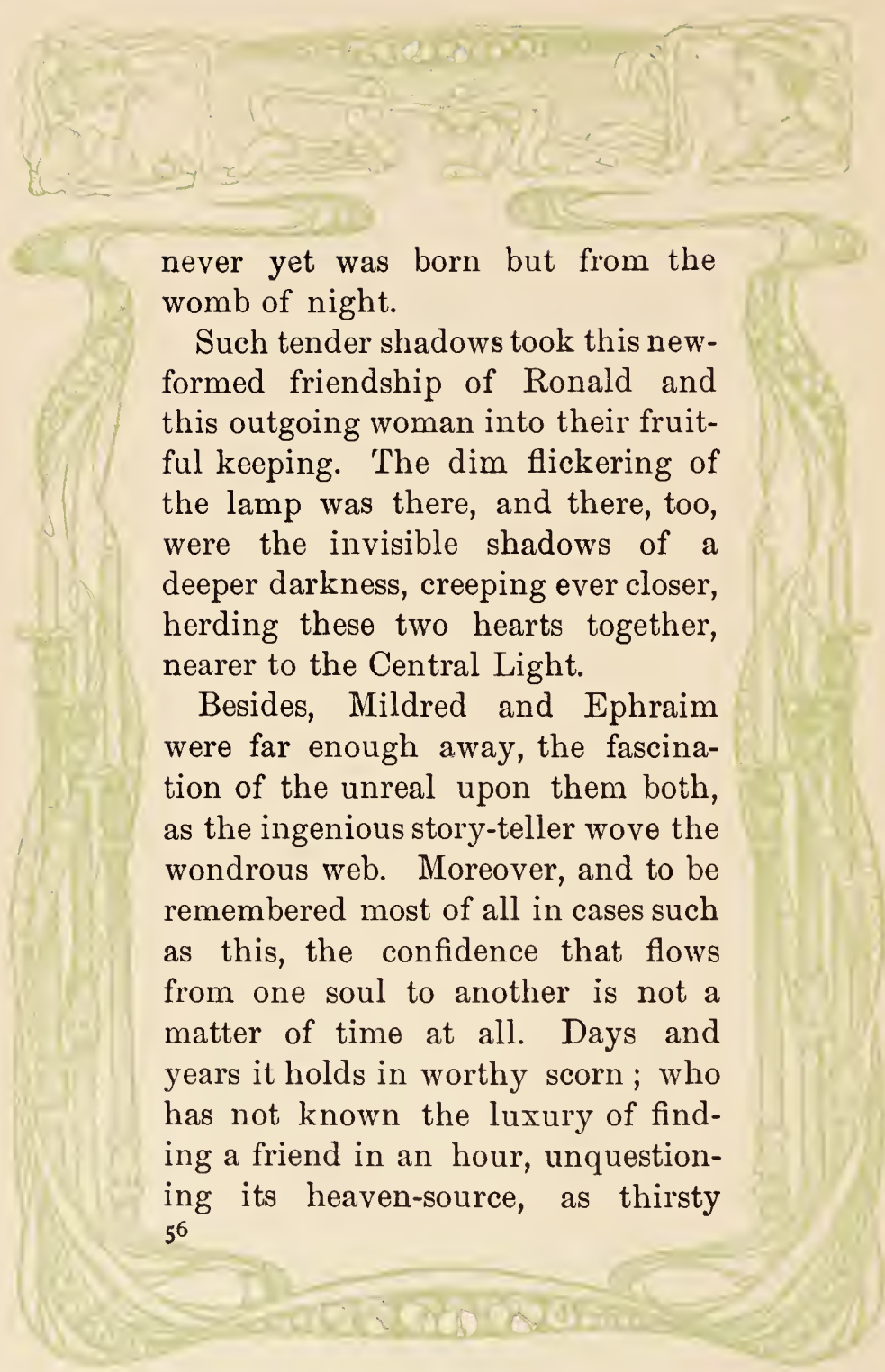
"Oh, aye—I ken," Ronald answered, considerable curiosity in his voice. "That'll be where ye was married, tae, will it no'?"

"Yes, I was married there," she said, her tone hushed and sad.



“That’ll be where the little yin’s faither died?” Ronald ventured, as considerately as he might.

It must be said, to justify what followed, that the light which flickered from the solitary lamp was subdued and dim—and the introduction of soul to soul is but seldom effected in the garish day. All of friendship’s commerce is, after all, a kind of courtship, nobler by virtue of its freedom from all grosser tinge of passion. And all truest friendship ripens amid the twilight; it may have its beginning beneath the glowing sun of prosperity and happiness, but it is only the tender dark that can bring it to its sweet maturity. It is alone the sacred light which darkness, or semi-darkness, casts, that reveals to each other kindred hearts, closer drawn together in loyalty and love to await the dawn that



never yet was born but from the womb of night.

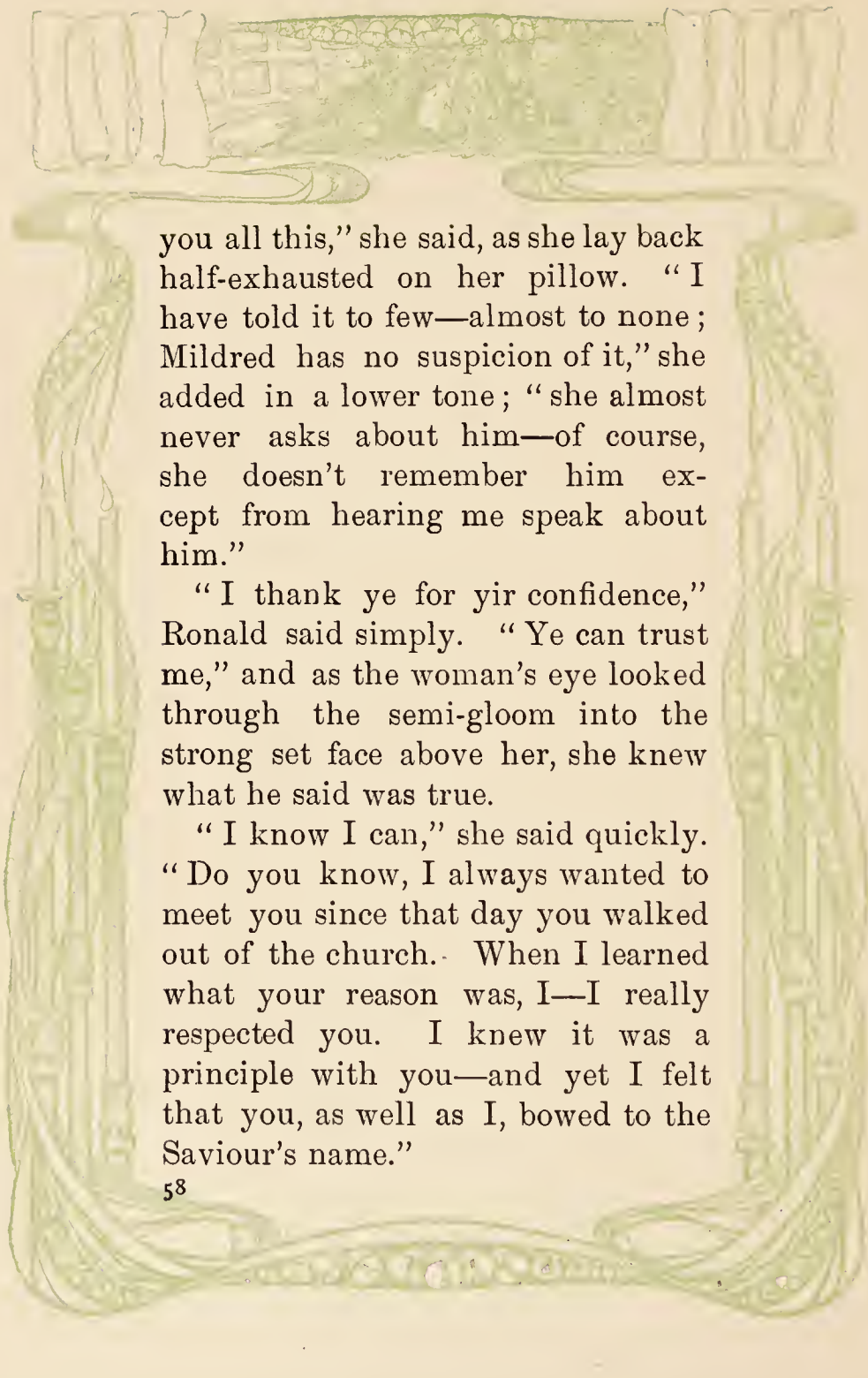
Such tender shadows took this new-formed friendship of Ronald and this outgoing woman into their fruitful keeping. The dim flickering of the lamp was there, and there, too, were the invisible shadows of a deeper darkness, creeping ever closer, herding these two hearts together, nearer to the Central Light.

Besides, Mildred and Ephraim were far enough away, the fascination of the unreal upon them both, as the ingenious story-teller wove the wondrous web. Moreover, and to be remembered most of all in cases such as this, the confidence that flows from one soul to another is not a matter of time at all. Days and years it holds in worthy scorn; who has not known the luxury of finding a friend in an hour, unquestioning its heaven-source, as thirsty

travellers question not the new-found spring, unmade of human hands, that leaps in crystal fullness at their feet?

Thus did it come about, amid the flickering shadows, that Mrs. Marlatt told to the silent listener beside her bed so much of the story of her life. Short and simple, and sad withal, were the annals of her past. Her girlhood life in England, her early marriage, the birth of her only child; the growing alienation of her husband, his lapse from sobriety and faithfulness, his final disappearance shortly after their arrival in America—these last were implied rather than expressly stated, the faltering voice tellingsadly that his whereabouts were now unknown, the last vague tidings indicating that he had shipped as a common seaman on a vessel bound for Brazil.

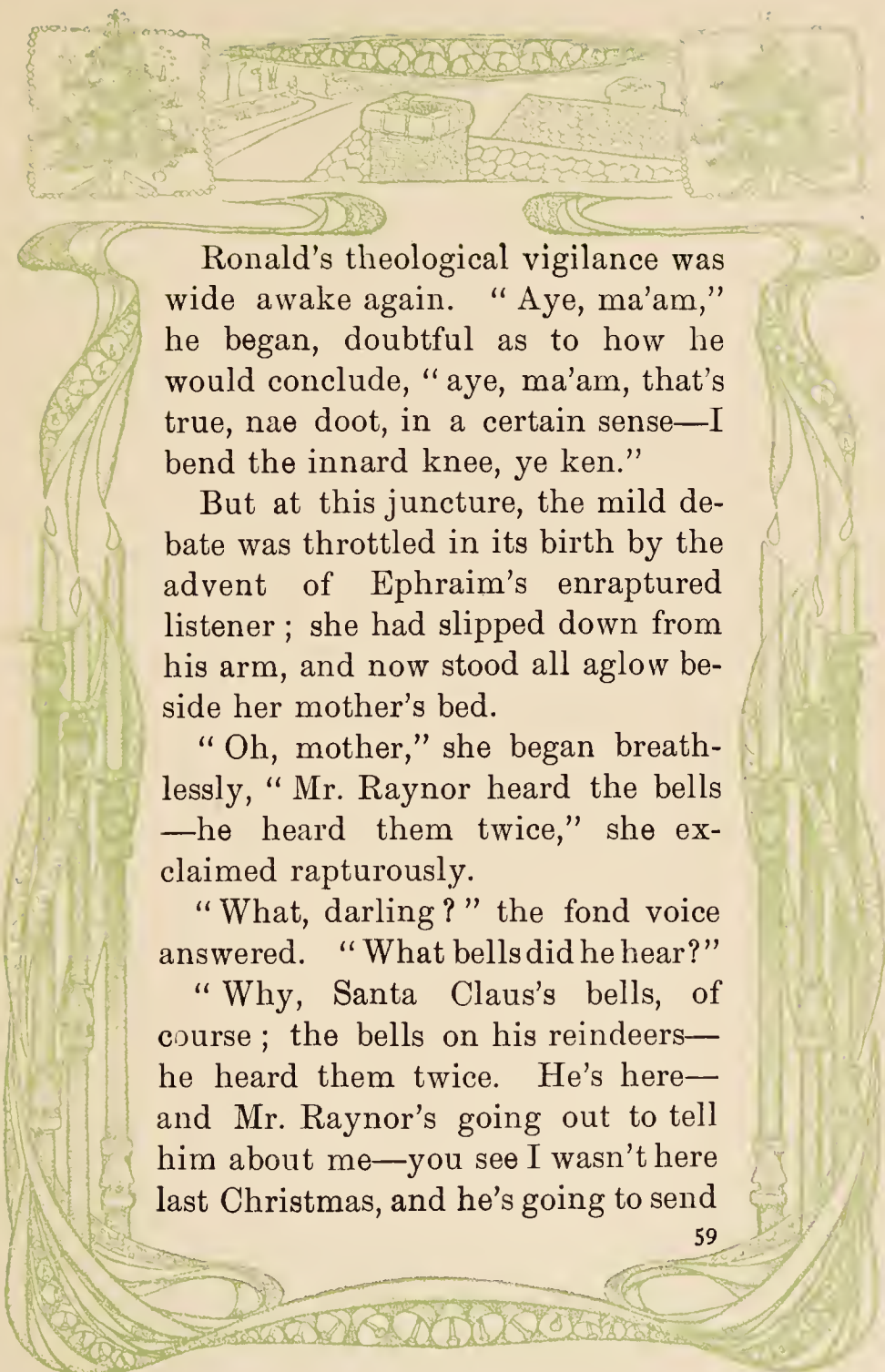
“I wonder why I should have told



you all this," she said, as she lay back half-exhausted on her pillow. "I have told it to few—almost to none; Mildred has no suspicion of it," she added in a lower tone; "she almost never asks about him—of course, she doesn't remember him except from hearing me speak about him."

"I thank ye for yir confidence," Ronald said simply. "Ye can trust me," and as the woman's eye looked through the semi-gloom into the strong set face above her, she knew what he said was true.

"I know I can," she said quickly. "Do you know, I always wanted to meet you since that day you walked out of the church. When I learned what your reason was, I—I really respected you. I knew it was a principle with you—and yet I felt that you, as well as I, bowed to the Saviour's name."



Ronald's theological vigilance was wide awake again. "Aye, ma'am," he began, doubtful as to how he would conclude, "aye, ma'am, that's true, nae doot, in a certain sense—I bend the innard knee, ye ken."

But at this juncture, the mild debate was throttled in its birth by the advent of Ephraim's enraptured listener; she had slipped down from his arm, and now stood all aglow beside her mother's bed.

"Oh, mother," she began breathlessly, "Mr. Raynor heard the bells—he heard them twice," she exclaimed rapturously.

"What, darling?" the fond voice answered. "What bells did he hear?"

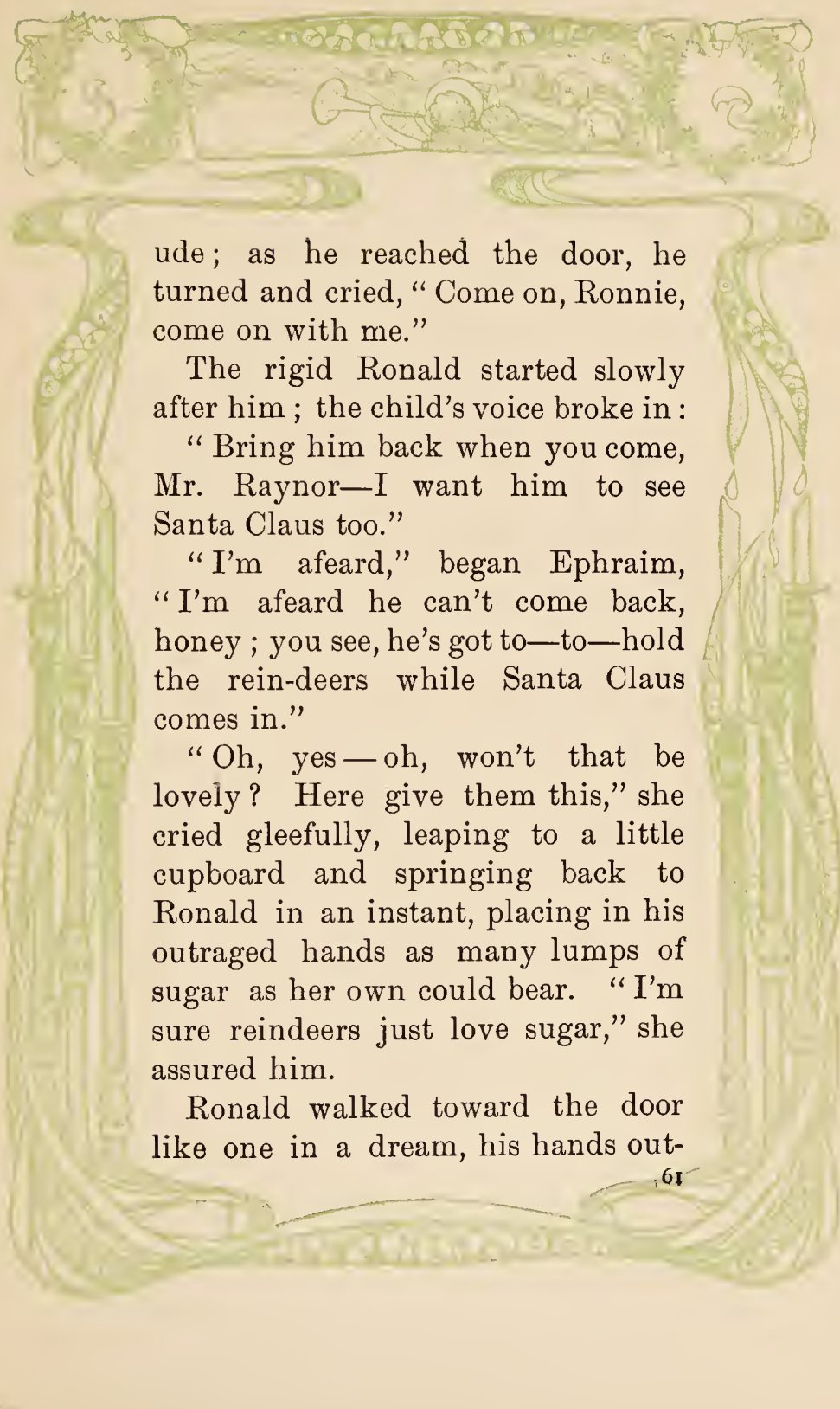
"Why, Santa Claus's bells, of course; the bells on his reindeers—he heard them twice. He's here—and Mr. Raynor's going out to tell him about me—you see I wasn't here last Christmas, and he's going to send

him in. You are, aren't you, Mr. Raynor?" she urged, her curls gleaming in the feeble light as she turned her twinkling face up to Ephraim's.

"Yes, child," said Ephraim. "I sure heard the bells—an' I'm just going out now to send Santa Claus in. He's a jolly old fellow; so don't be afraid, honey—you must talk to him if you want to, and ask him anything you like. He loves little girls, you know."

Chill horror took possession of Ronald's soul, and his startled conscience loomed, as if enthroned, amid the storm upon his brow. He was thinking of Ephraim's soul; the outlook was dark, so far as he could see, and there swam before him a lurid picture of that lake of fire in which all liars have their well-earned part.

Ephraim saw his friend's disquiet-



ude; as he reached the door, he turned and cried, "Come on, Ronnie, come on with me."

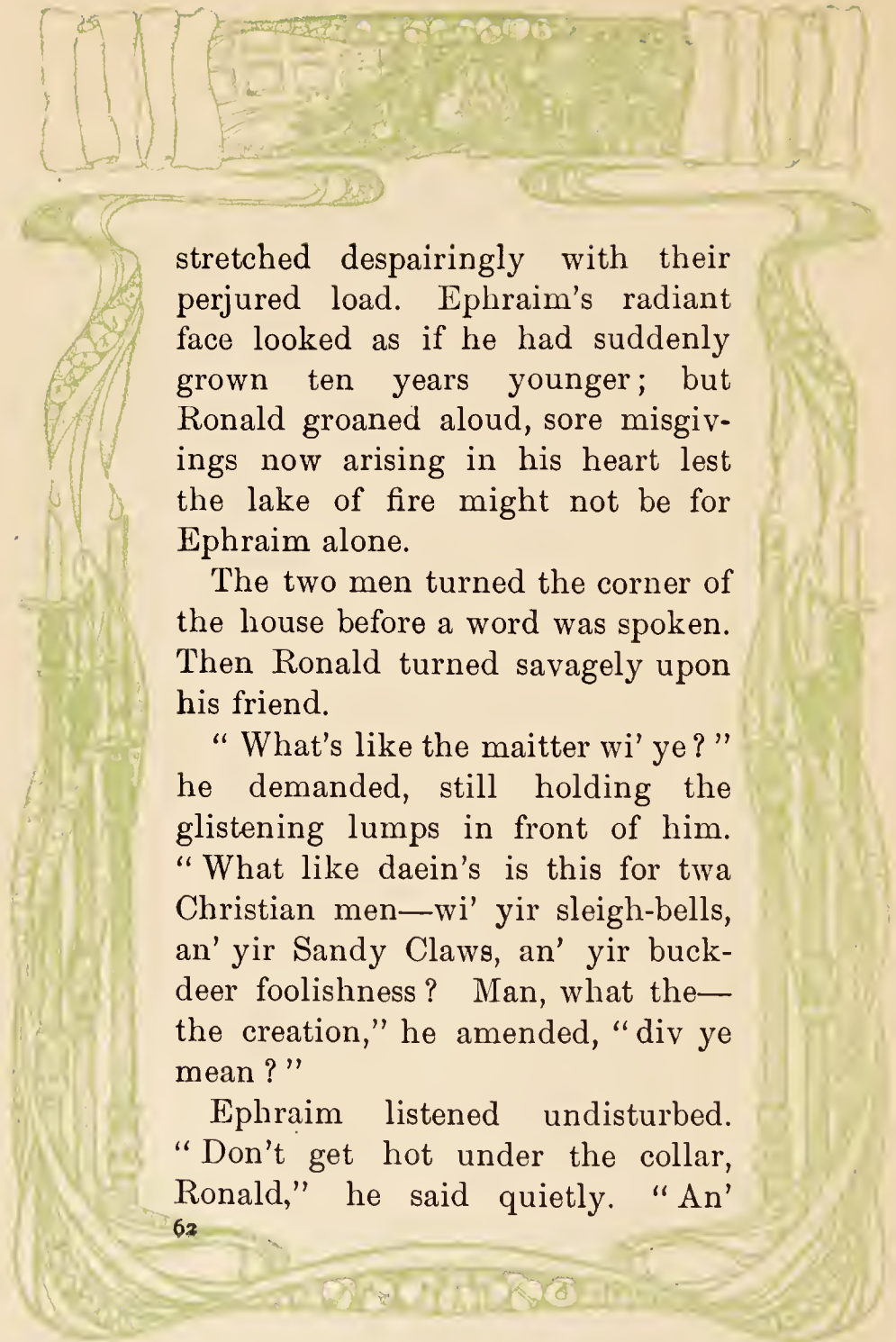
The rigid Ronald started slowly after him; the child's voice broke in:

"Bring him back when you come, Mr. Raynor—I want him to see Santa Claus too."

"I'm afeard," began Ephraim, "I'm afeard he can't come back, honey; you see, he's got to—to—hold the rein-deers while Santa Claus comes in."

"Oh, yes—oh, won't that be lovely? Here give them this," she cried gleefully, leaping to a little cupboard and springing back to Ronald in an instant, placing in his outraged hands as many lumps of sugar as her own could bear. "I'm sure reindeers just love sugar," she assured him.

Ronald walked toward the door like one in a dream, his hands out-

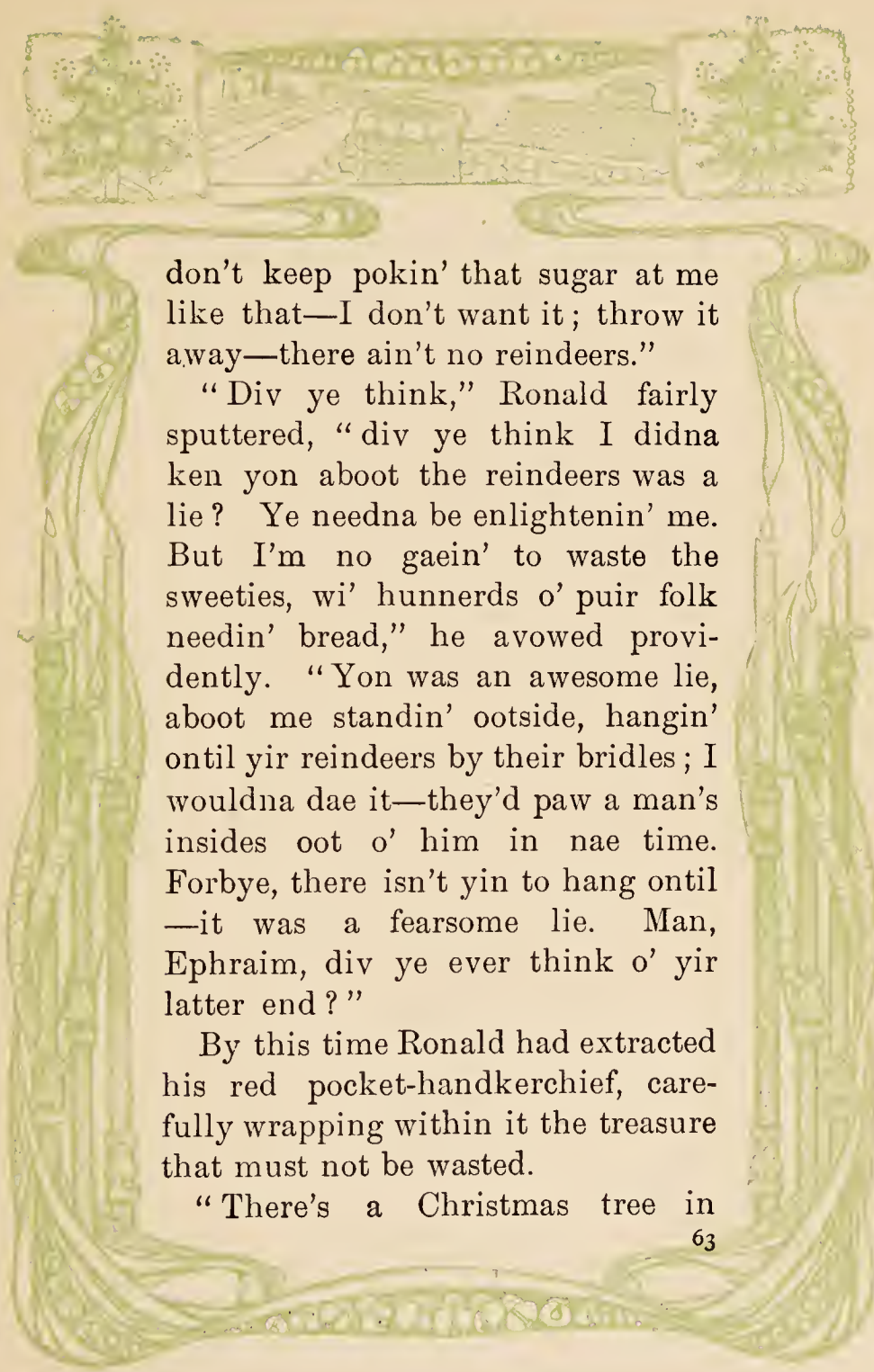


stretched despairingly with their perjured load. Ephraim's radiant face looked as if he had suddenly grown ten years younger; but Ronald groaned aloud, sore misgivings now arising in his heart lest the lake of fire might not be for Ephraim alone.

The two men turned the corner of the house before a word was spoken. Then Ronald turned savagely upon his friend.

"What's like the maitter wi' ye?" he demanded, still holding the glistening lumps in front of him. "What like daein's is this for twa Christian men—wi' yir sleigh-bells, an' yir Sandy Claws, an' yir buck-deer foolishness? Man, what the—the creation," he amended, "div ye mean?"

Ephraim listened undisturbed. "Don't get hot under the collar, Ronald," he said quietly. "An'

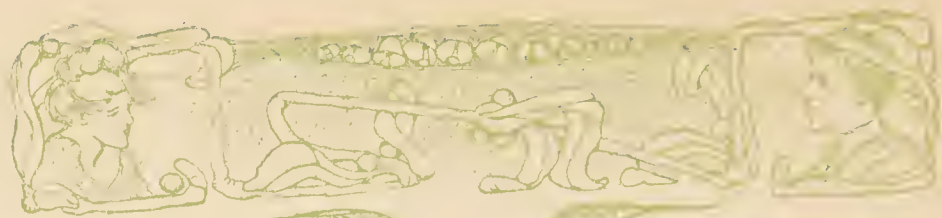


don't keep pokin' that sugar at me like that—I don't want it; throw it away—there ain't no reindeers."

"Div ye think," Ronald fairly sputtered, "div ye think I didna ken yon aboot the reindeers was a lie? Ye needna be enlightenin' me. But I'm no gaein' to waste the sweeties, wi' hunnerds o' puir folk needin' bread," he avowed providently. "Yon was an awesome lie, aboot me standin' ootside, hangin' ontill yir reindeers by their bridles; I wouldna dae it—they'd paw a man's insides oot o' him in nae time. Forbye, there isn't yin to hang ontill—it was a fearsome lie. Man, Ephraim, div ye ever think o' yir latter end?"

By this time Ronald had extracted his red pocket-handkerchief, carefully wrapping within it the treasure that must not be wasted.

"There's a Christmas tree in



there," Ephraim announced calmly, after the storm was somewhat spent. He pointed toward the little house.

"A what?" exclaimed Ronald. "In where?"

"In the house—behind that curtain you saw. There's a Christmas tree in there; I fixed it last night and put a lot of pretty things on it. An' the little one doesn't know—she promised her mother this morning not to look."

"It's sair foolishness for the heid o' a family to be mixin' wi'," commented Ronald sadly. "Ye'd be better readin' yir Bible, Ephraim, I'm thinkin'."

"It's too dark," Ephraim replied laconically. "Besides, I've got to get busy. Ronald, do you know what you've got to do?"

"Me!" said Ronald, "I'm no gaein' to dae onything—I'm gaein' hame."

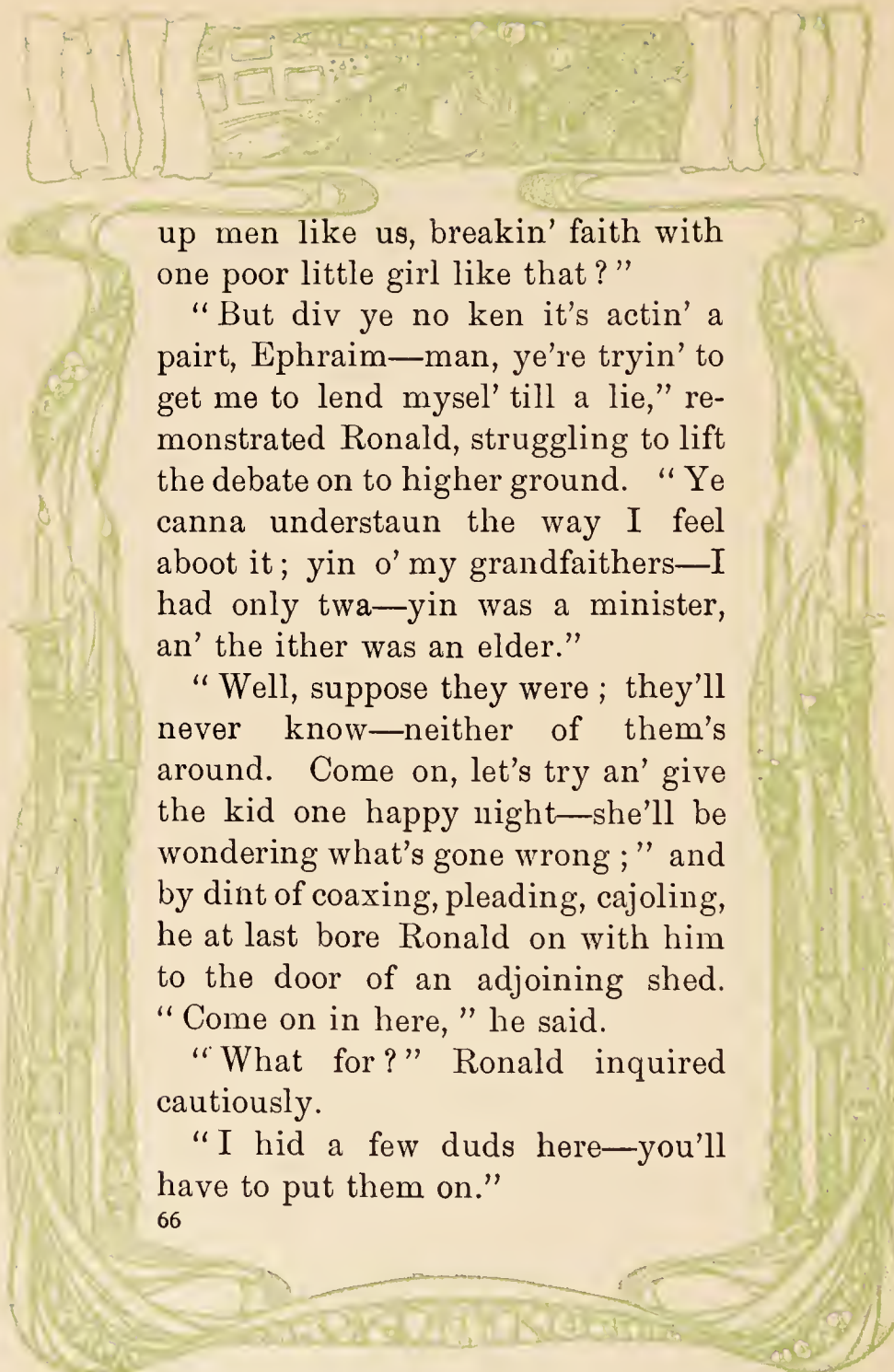
"No, you're not, not by a long chalk—you've got to be the Santa Claus, Ronnie." And Ephraim's voice was low and sweet.

"Heigh!" Ronald almost shouted, doubtful of his own hearing, "what's that ye're sayin'? I've got to be what?"

"Santa Claus," returned Ephraim quietly. "That's what you've got to be, Ronald. I'd like to be it myself—but there's more or less talkin' that's got to be done, and the youngster knows my voice. I might disguise it a little—but this is far better; she hardly heard you speak."

"But ye dinna mean to say," Ronald interrupted, "as ye're tryin' to get an auld man like me to mak a fool o' himsel' like that?"

"You've got to do it, Ronnie. There's no one else, an' we can't disappoint the little one; what would the good Lord think of two grown-



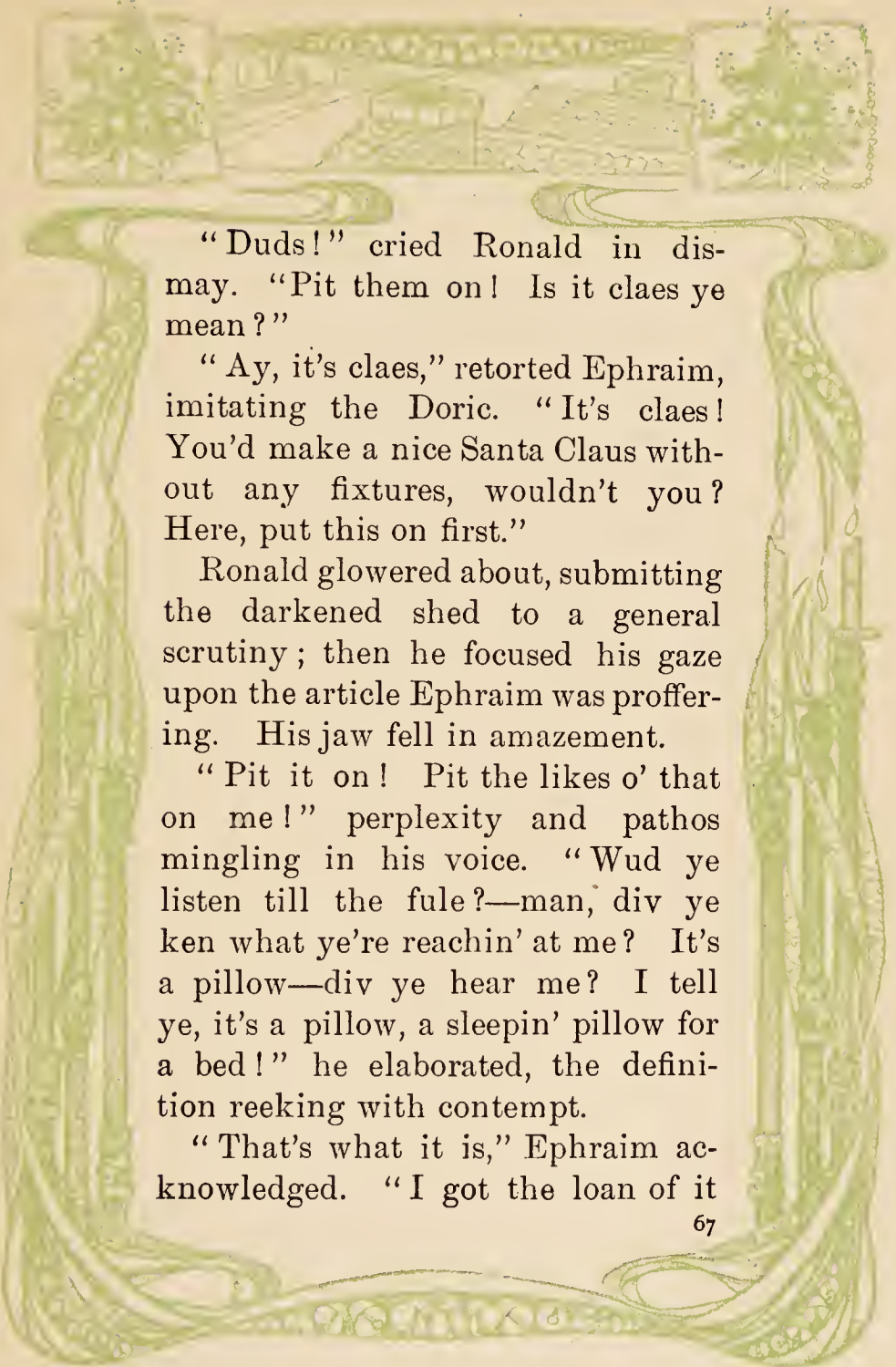
up men like us, breakin' faith with one poor little girl like that?"

"But div ye no ken it's actin' a pairt, Ephraim—man, ye're tryin' to get me to lend mysel' till a lie," remonstrated Ronald, struggling to lift the debate on to higher ground. "Ye canna understaun the way I feel aboot it; yin o' my grandfaithers—I had only twa—yin was a minister, an' the ither was an elder."

"Well, suppose they were; they'll never know—neither of them's around. Come on, let's try an' give the kid one happy night—she'll be wondering what's gone wrong;" and by dint of coaxing, pleading, cajoling, he at last bore Ronald on with him to the door of an adjoining shed. "Come on in here," he said.

"What for?" Ronald inquired cautiously.

"I hid a few duds here—you'll have to put them on."



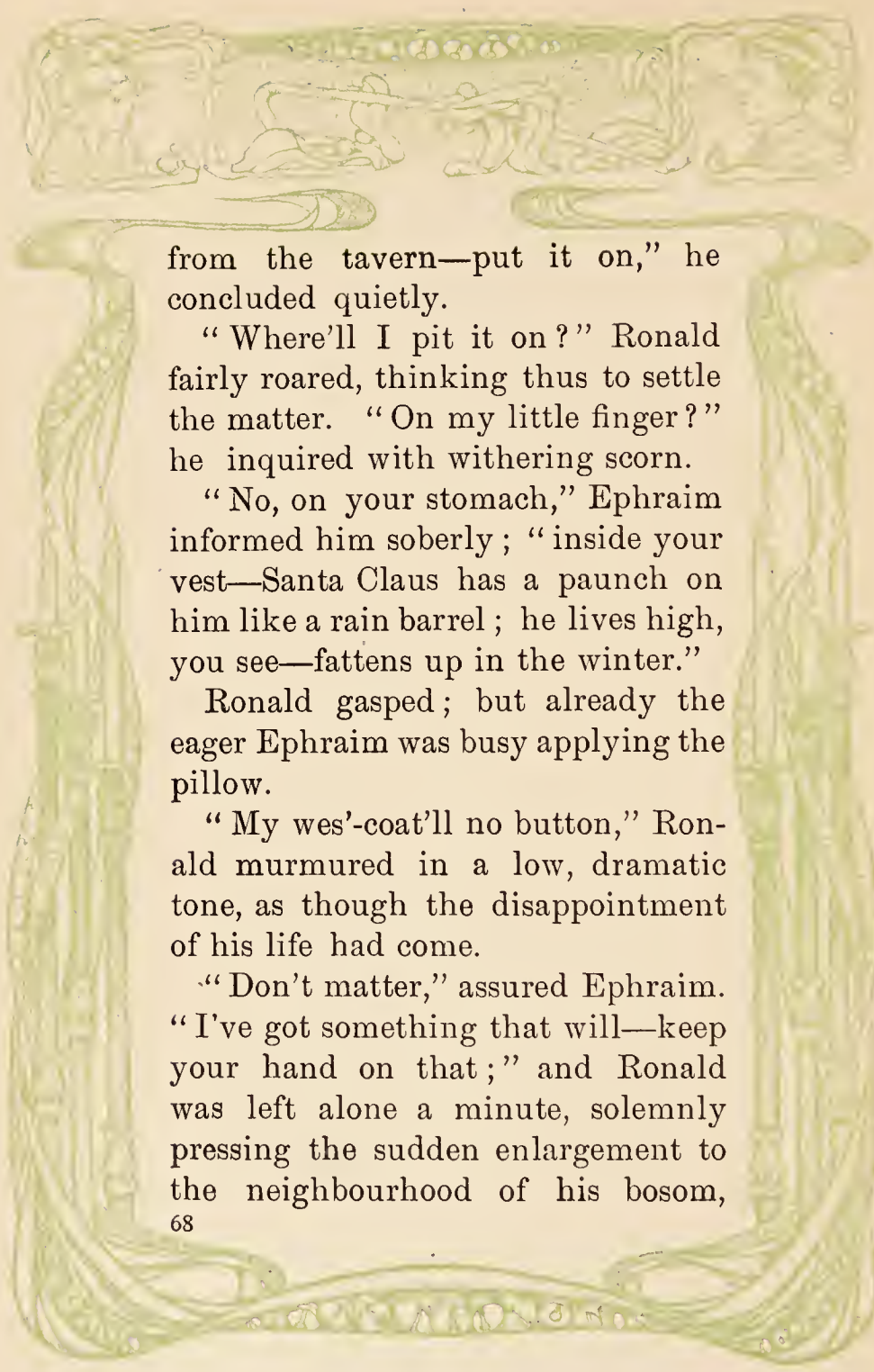
“Duds!” cried Ronald in dismay. “Pit them on! Is it claes ye mean?”

“Ay, it’s claes,” retorted Ephraim, imitating the Doric. “It’s claes! You’d make a nice Santa Claus without any fixtures, wouldn’t you? Here, put this on first.”

Ronald glowered about, submitting the darkened shed to a general scrutiny; then he focused his gaze upon the article Ephraim was proffering. His jaw fell in amazement.

“Pit it on! Pit the likes o’ that on me!” perplexity and pathos mingling in his voice. “Wud ye listen till the fule?—man, div ye ken what ye’re reachin’ at me? It’s a pillow—div ye hear me? I tell ye, it’s a pillow, a sleepin’ pillow for a bed!” he elaborated, the definition reeking with contempt.

“That’s what it is,” Ephraim acknowledged. “I got the loan of it



from the tavern—put it on," he concluded quietly.

"Where'll I pit it on?" Ronald fairly roared, thinking thus to settle the matter. "On my little finger?" he inquired with withering scorn.

"No, on your stomach," Ephraim informed him soberly; "inside your vest—Santa Claus has a paunch on him like a rain barrel; he lives high, you see—fattens up in the winter."

Ronald gasped; but already the eager Ephraim was busy applying the pillow.

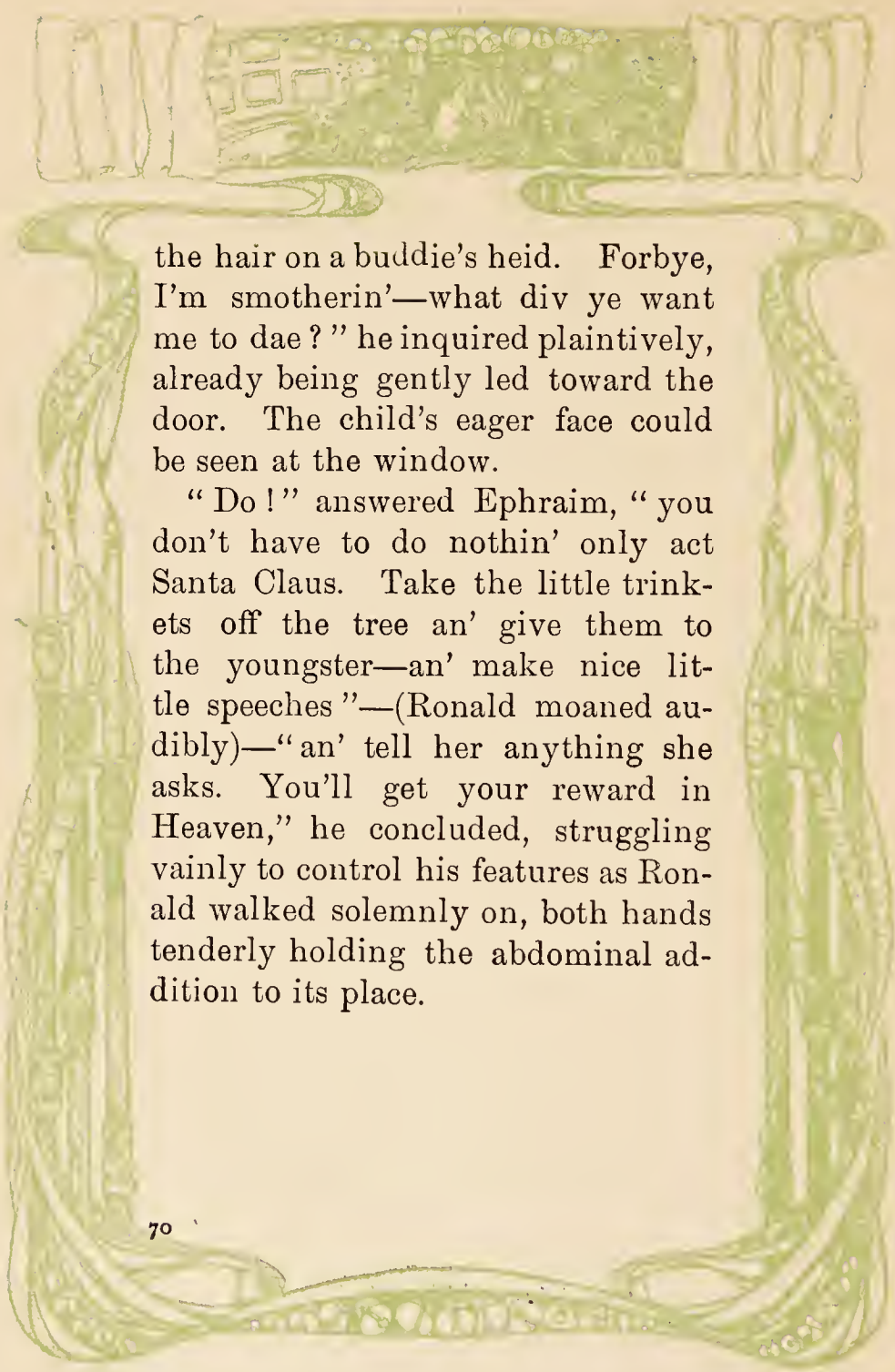
"My wes'-coat'll no button," Ronald murmured in a low, dramatic tone, as though the disappointment of his life had come.

"Don't matter," assured Ephraim. "I've got something that will—keep your hand on that;" and Ronald was left alone a minute, solemnly pressing the sudden enlargement to the neighbourhood of his bosom,

while Ephraim extracted an ample garment from a barrel in the corner. It was much the worse for wear.

"Here, this'll meet," he exclaimed cheerily as he wrapped a huge coon-skin coat about the composite frame. Through the encircling collar he could see the look of gray despair on Ronald's face, and it pleased him well. Quickly he added an ancient cap, a pair of gauntlets, and a flaming muffler that encircled the imperial waist, binding the frontal endowment to its place. The final touch came with the adjustment of a mask, rosy-cheeked and ample-bearded, from which Ronald's eyes looked out in helpless pleading.

"Tak it off," he groaned beseechingly, "it's an ungodly business ye're forcin' on me. If I was to get my call, I'd be a fine figure in Heeven, luikin' through this paste-board thing, wi' its sheep's wool for



the hair on a buddie's heid. Forbye, I'm smotherin'—what div ye want me to dae?" he inquired plaintively, already being gently led toward the door. The child's eager face could be seen at the window.

"Do!" answered Ephraim, "you don't have to do nothin' only act Santa Claus. Take the little trinkets off the tree an' give them to the youngster—an' make nice little speeches"—(Ronald moaned audibly)—"an' tell her anything she asks. You'll get your reward in Heaven," he concluded, struggling vainly to control his features as Ronald walked solemnly on, both hands tenderly holding the abdominal addition to its place.



How Ronnie Took the Hurdle



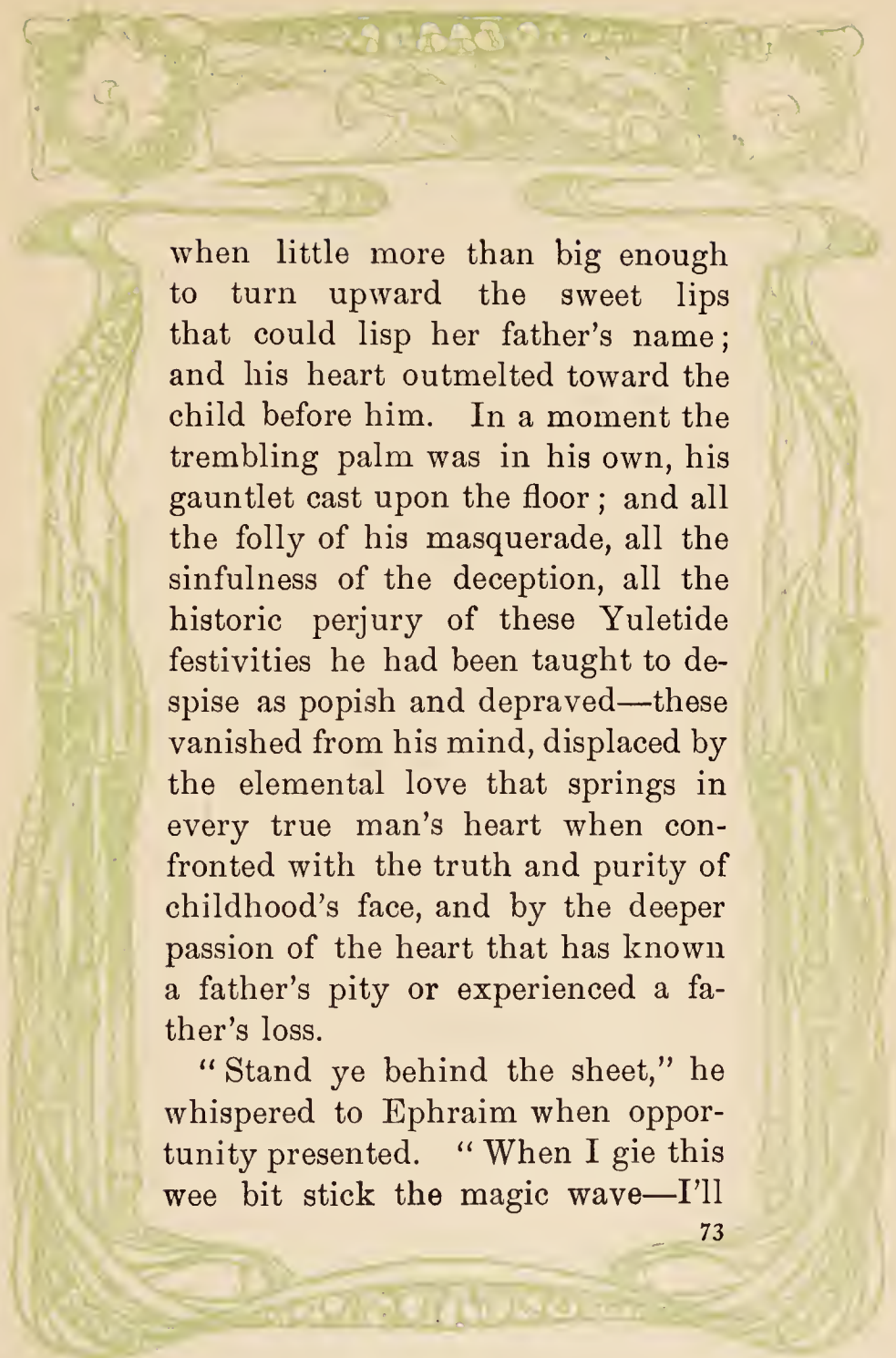
A MOMENT later they were both blinking before the flickering lamp and beaming stove that illumined the little room. Mildred, seized of that ecstatic terror that only children and Christmas know, flew to her mother's bedside at the first opening of the door.

"Don't be afraid; it's Santa Claus," the mother's voice whispered to the child. This was confirmed by Ephraim's stouter tone.

"Come on, little one; come an'

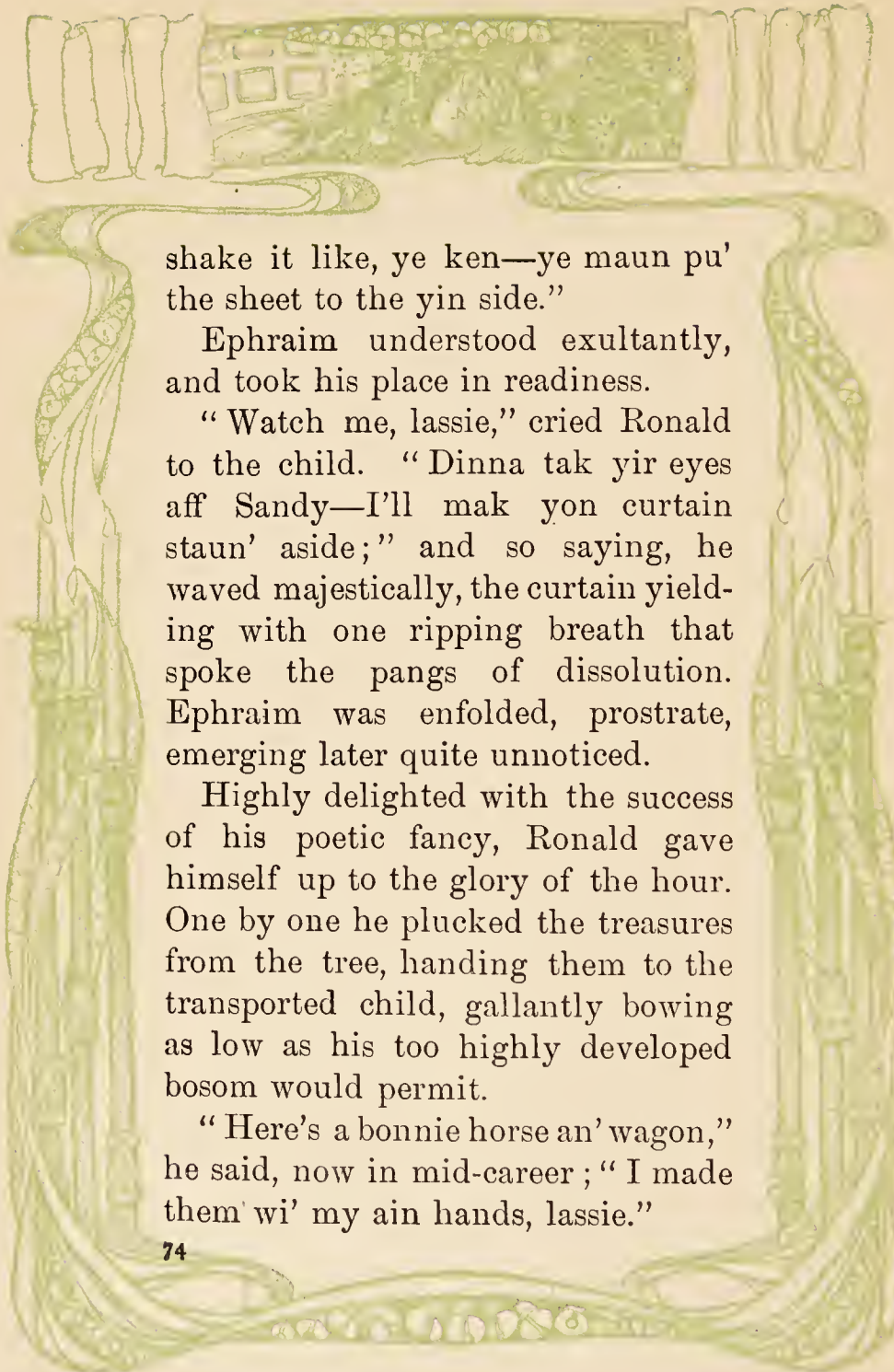
shake hands with Santa. He loves little children."

Gently he beguiled the child into obedience, his efforts seconded by the mother's pleading; till at last, slowly and with sweet girlish shyness, Mildred stole toward the bulky figure, extending one tiny palm, the other still outstretched toward the bed she had left behind. Ronald drew closer to her; and as the wondering face, aglow with almost reverent eagerness, was turned upward to his own, the strong man's heart seemed suddenly to slip its leash. For the eternal childlike was in her face, holding in its hand the universal key. Ronald thought of Hugh, and of Hugh's golden childhood days—even of his own he thought, free though his had been from such frivolities as these. He thought of another—of Hugh's baby sister—who had gone from him



when little more than big enough to turn upward the sweet lips that could lisp her father's name; and his heart outmelted toward the child before him. In a moment the trembling palm was in his own, his gauntlet cast upon the floor; and all the folly of his masquerade, all the sinfulness of the deception, all the historic perjury of these Yuletide festivities he had been taught to despise as popish and depraved—these vanished from his mind, displaced by the elemental love that springs in every true man's heart when confronted with the truth and purity of childhood's face, and by the deeper passion of the heart that has known a father's pity or experienced a father's loss.

“Stand ye behind the sheet,” he whispered to Ephraim when opportunity presented. “When I gie this wee bit stick the magic wave—I’ll



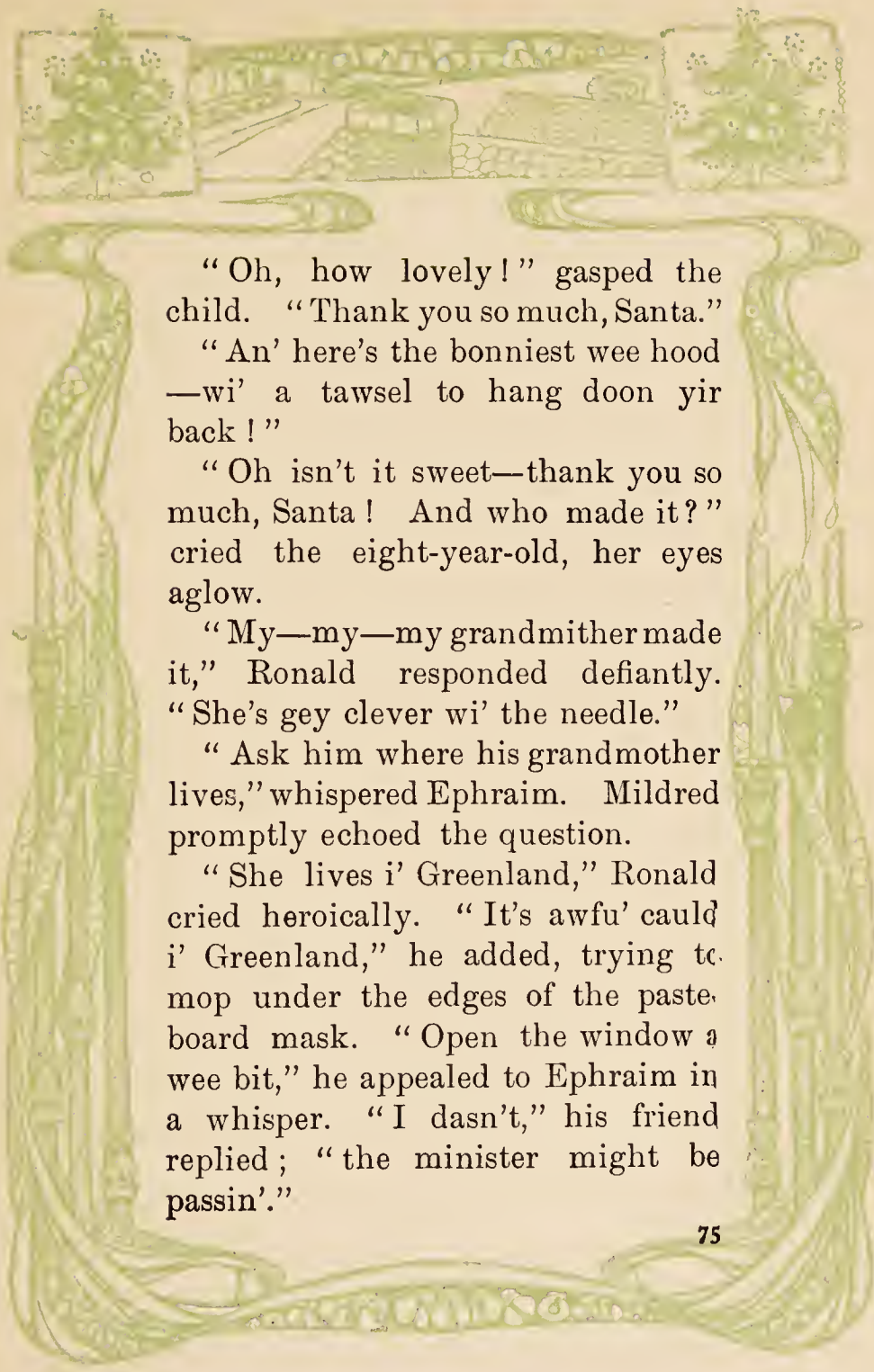
shake it like, ye ken—ye maun pu' the sheet to the yin side."

Ephraim understood exultantly, and took his place in readiness.

"Watch me, lassie," cried Ronald to the child. "Dinna tak yir eyes aff Sandy—I'll mak yon curtain staun' aside;" and so saying, he waved majestically, the curtain yielding with one ripping breath that spoke the pangs of dissolution. Ephraim was enfolded, prostrate, emerging later quite unnoticed.

Highly delighted with the success of his poetic fancy, Ronald gave himself up to the glory of the hour. One by one he plucked the treasures from the tree, handing them to the transported child, gallantly bowing as low as his too highly developed bosom would permit.

"Here's a bonnie horse an' wagon," he said, now in mid-career; "I made them wi' my ain hands, lassie."



“Oh, how lovely!” gasped the child. “Thank you so much, Santa.”

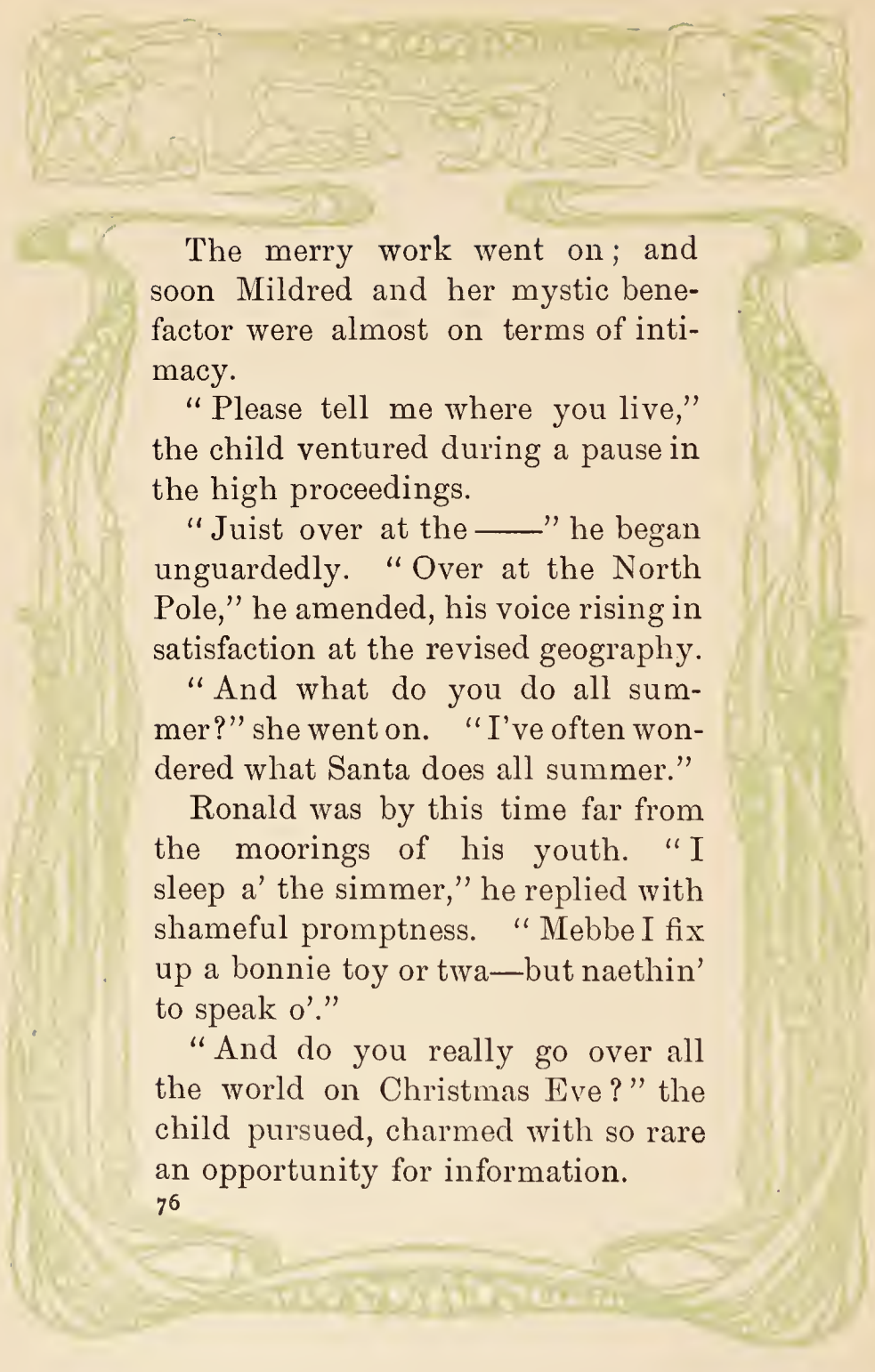
“An’ here’s the bonniest wee hood—wi’ a tawsel to hang doon yir back!”

“Oh isn’t it sweet—thank you so much, Santa! And who made it?” cried the eight-year-old, her eyes aglow.

“My—my—my grandmither made it,” Ronald responded defiantly. “She’s gey clever wi’ the needle.”

“Ask him where his grandmother lives,” whispered Ephraim. Mildred promptly echoed the question.

“She lives i’ Greenland,” Ronald cried heroically. “It’s awfu’ cauld i’ Greenland,” he added, trying to mop under the edges of the pasteboard mask. “Open the window a wee bit,” he appealed to Ephraim in a whisper. “I dasn’t,” his friend replied; “the minister might be passin’.”



The merry work went on; and soon Mildred and her mystic benefactor were almost on terms of intimacy.

"Please tell me where you live," the child ventured during a pause in the high proceedings.

"Juist over at the ——" he began unguardedly. "Over at the North Pole," he amended, his voice rising in satisfaction at the revised geography.

"And what do you do all summer?" she went on. "I've often wondered what Santa does all summer."

Ronald was by this time far from the moorings of his youth. "I sleep a' the simmer," he replied with shameful promptness. "Mebbe I fix up a bonnie toy or twa—but naethin' to speak o'."

"And do you really go over all the world on Christmas Eve?" the child pursued, charmed with so rare an opportunity for information.

“Ay, I gang everywhere—I’m gaein’ till Africy when I’m through wi’ here,” said Ronald calmly.

“But they’ll be asleep,” interposed his questioner, wide-awake she.

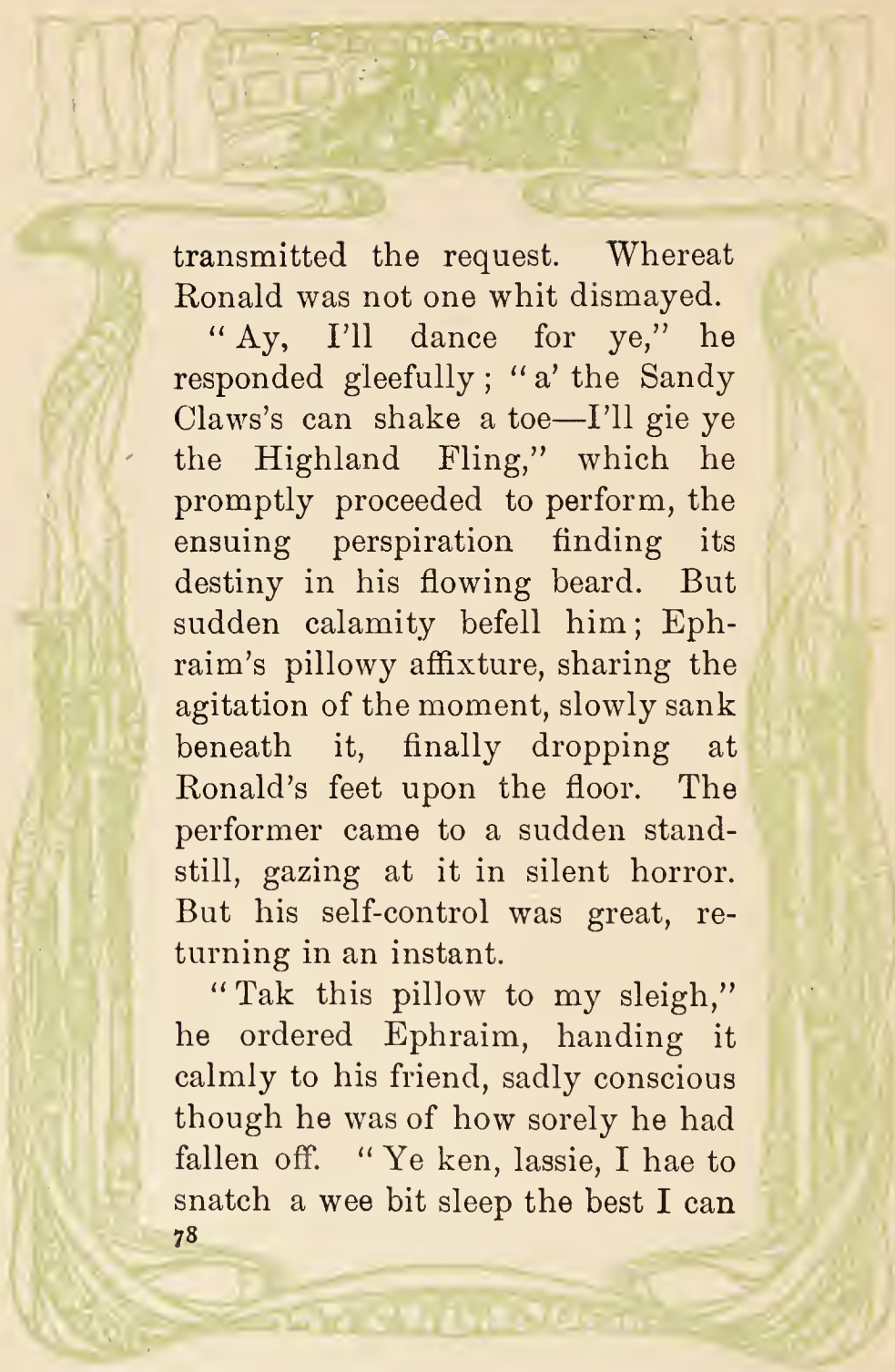
“Mebbe sae—ay, they’ll be asleep. But I gang doon the chimney, ye ken; it’s no hard when ye’re used till it. I must be gaein’ noo—my reindeers is waitin’ at the door.”

The girl flew to the window at the word, her hands to her eyes.

“They’re not there, Santa,” she cried in disappointment, “I can’t see them.”

“Oh, ay—ay,” Ronald said in some embarrassment. “Oh, I forgot, lassie, I left them i’ the taivern sheds.” The child’s glistening eyes seemed to fire his own as they flashed their flame into his face.

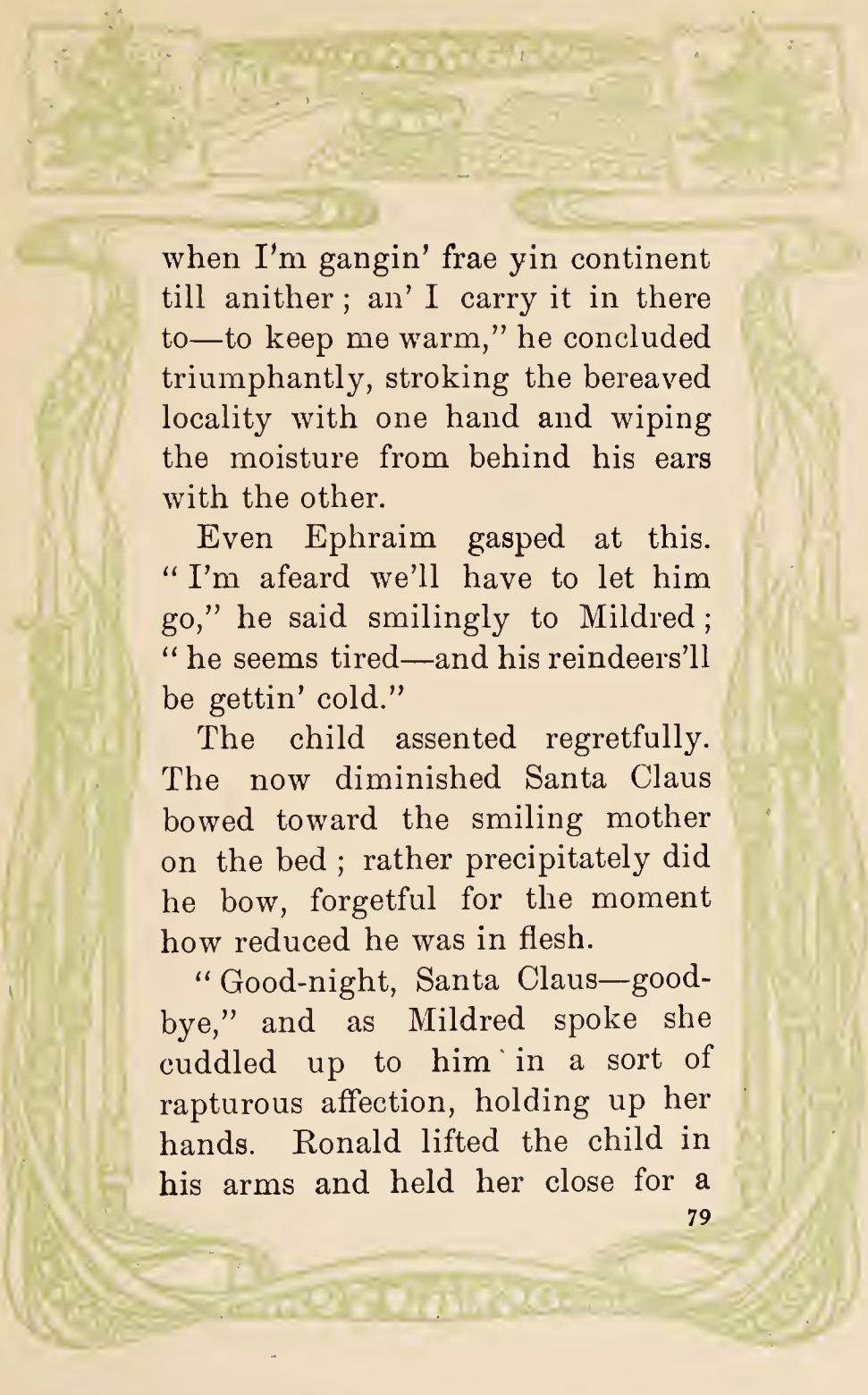
“Ask him to dance,” Ephraim whispered. Mildred cheerfully



transmitted the request. Whereat Ronald was not one whit dismayed.

“Ay, I’ll dance for ye,” he responded gleefully; “a’ the Sandy Claws’s can shake a toe—I’ll gie ye the Highland Fling,” which he promptly proceeded to perform, the ensuing perspiration finding its destiny in his flowing beard. But sudden calamity befell him; Ephraim’s pillowy affixture, sharing the agitation of the moment, slowly sank beneath it, finally dropping at Ronald’s feet upon the floor. The performer came to a sudden stand-still, gazing at it in silent horror. But his self-control was great, returning in an instant.

“Tak this pillow to my sleigh,” he ordered Ephraim, handing it calmly to his friend, sadly conscious though he was of how sorely he had fallen off. “Ye ken, lassie, I hae to snatch a wee bit sleep the best I can



when I'm gangin' frae yin continent till anither; an' I carry it in there to—to keep me warm," he concluded triumphantly, stroking the bereaved locality with one hand and wiping the moisture from behind his ears with the other.

Even Ephraim gasped at this. "I'm afeard we'll have to let him go," he said smilingly to Mildred; "he seems tired—and his reindeers'll be gettin' cold."

The child assented regretfully. The now diminished Santa Claus bowed toward the smiling mother on the bed; rather precipitately did he bow, forgetful for the moment how reduced he was in flesh.

"Good-night, Santa Claus—good-bye," and as Mildred spoke she cuddled up to him in a sort of rapturous affection, holding up her hands. Ronald lifted the child in his arms and held her close for a



moment, his whole being strangely thrilled by the warm and magnetic touch. Then he thrust his hand within the folds of the coon-skin coat, rummaging in an inner pocket; moving toward the now dismantled tree, he pretended to pluck something from the topmost bough.

“Here’s a wee bit paper screed frae Sandy,” he said gallantly. “Mebbe ye’ll find his address on it.”

Mildred examined it a moment in the light of the glowing stove and then rushed toward the bed.

“Oh, mother, look—look, mother; it’s twenty—it’s twenty dollars,” she cried incredulously. The wasted hand received it and the wan face turned toward the dispenser. But a draught of chilly air greeted her as she turned, the door closing rapidly behind two outgoing figures, and she could just hear Ronald’s voice from without.

“ Merry Christmas to ye a’ ! Merry Christmas, an’ God bless ye ! ”

The two cronies walked on beneath the glowing stars. Ephraim was the first to speak. “ There must a’ been a curious joy about dyin’ on the cross,” he said suddenly.

“ Joy ! ” echoed Ronald, “ what dae ye mean ? ”

“ Oh, nothin’,” responded the other. “ Only it’s so much fun to give something—an’ that other was the high water mark.”

Ronald made no reply, his mind earnestly engaged with another matter. And as they stood a moment at the corner that marked the parting of their ways, he looked Ephraim full in the face, and his words were very solemn.

“ Ephraim, div ye think the Lord’ll hae mercy on my soul ? ”

Ephraim pondered. “ I would if

I was Him," he said slowly at length ;
" besides, I shouldn't wonder if it
was Him put you up to it," he added
hopefully. " Yes, I think He'll for-
give you—in a general way."

" Ye mean that ye're no sure aboot
that Greenland bit — an' about
Africy?" Ronald conjectured eagerly,
fearful himself that these exceptions
were only just.

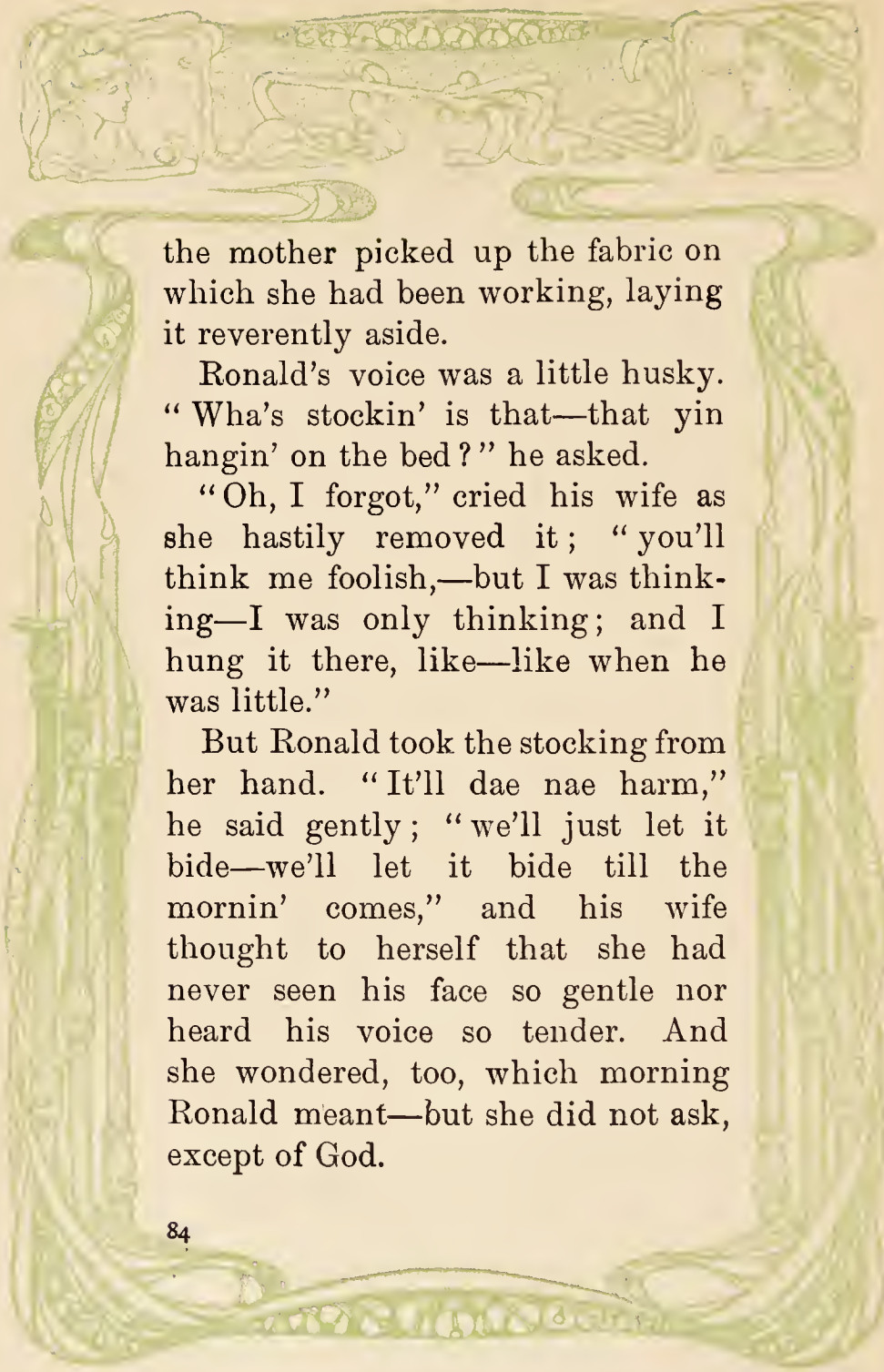
" Yes," Ephraim admitted slowly ;
" an' that was pretty handy about
the sheds—the tavern sheds, you re-
member ; yes," he continued thought-
fully, " them three bits was kind o'
—they was uncommon original,
Ronald," he hastened to conclude,
well pleased with the charitable
flavour of the adjective.

Ronald found his wife ready to
retire as he entered. He had just
completed an explanation of his
absence, a very limited one, when
she said :

“The minister was here to-night ; and he wants you, even if you don’t come to church, to be present at the communion next Sabbath. And I almost promised for you.”

Ronald waited a minute before he spoke. “Na, na,” he said finally, “I’ll no gang till the Saicrament ; I dinna believe in Saicraments at Christmas. An’ I’ve been actin’ scandalous, forbye. What’s that ye’re fixin’, Mary ?” he inquired abruptly, partly to change the subject, and partly because something on the bed attracted his attention.

The smile that stole over his wife’s face was touched by tender sweetness. “I’ll tell you, Ronnie,” she began, her eyes suffused ; “I was just making a new dress for wee Bessie’s doll. If—if any thing should happen us, father—I want Hugh always to know he had a little sister ; he was so small when she went away,” and



the mother picked up the fabric on which she had been working, laying it reverently aside.

Ronald's voice was a little husky. "Wha's stockin' is that—that yin hangin' on the bed?" he asked.

"Oh, I forgot," cried his wife as she hastily removed it; "you'll think me foolish,—but I was thinking—I was only thinking; and I hung it there, like—like when he was little."

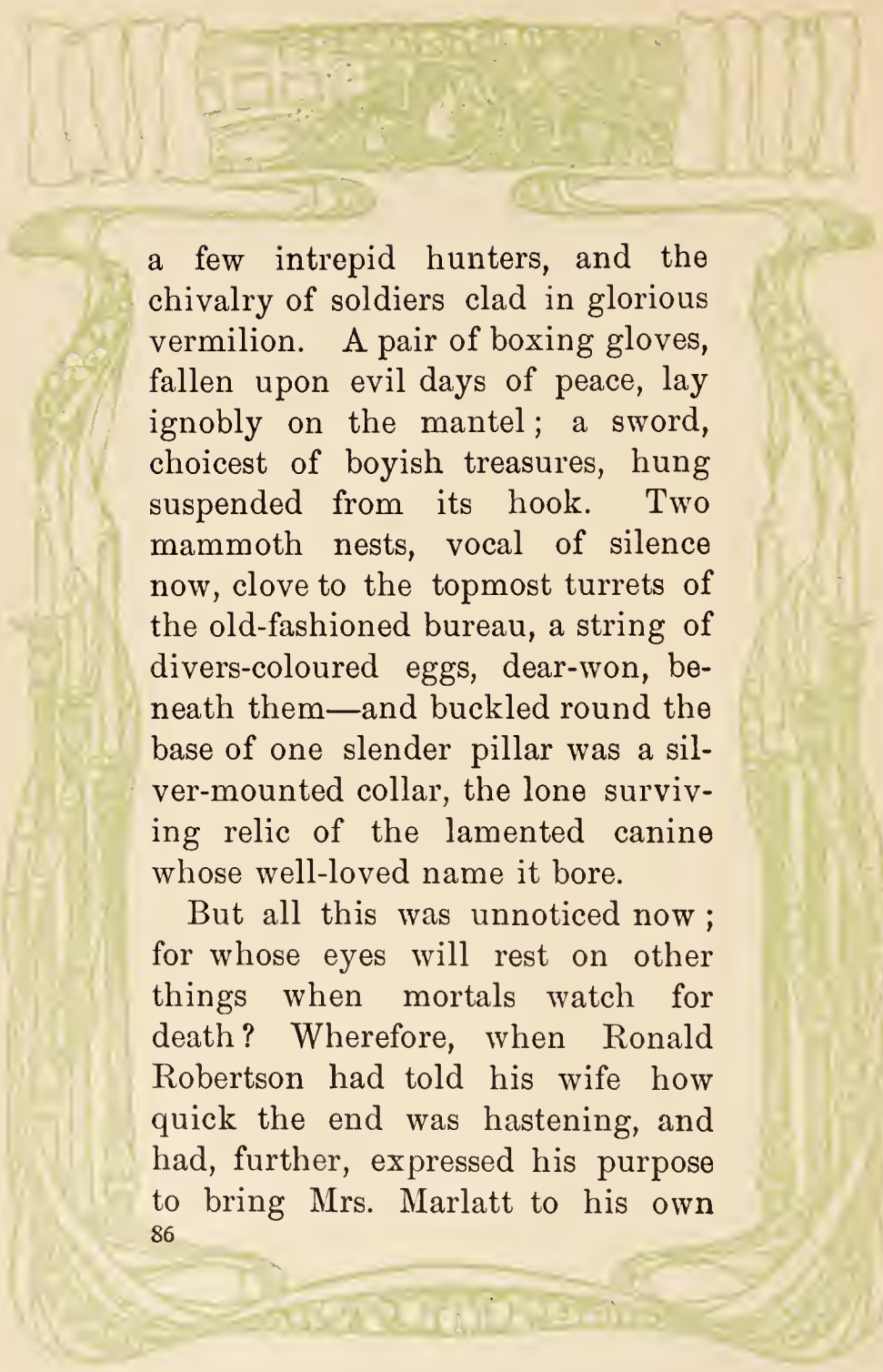
But Ronald took the stocking from her hand. "It'll dae nae harm," he said gently; "we'll just let it bide—we'll let it bide till the mornin' comes," and his wife thought to herself that she had never seen his face so gentle nor heard his voice so tender. And she wondered, too, which morning Ronald meant—but she did not ask, except of God.



Ronnie's Contract

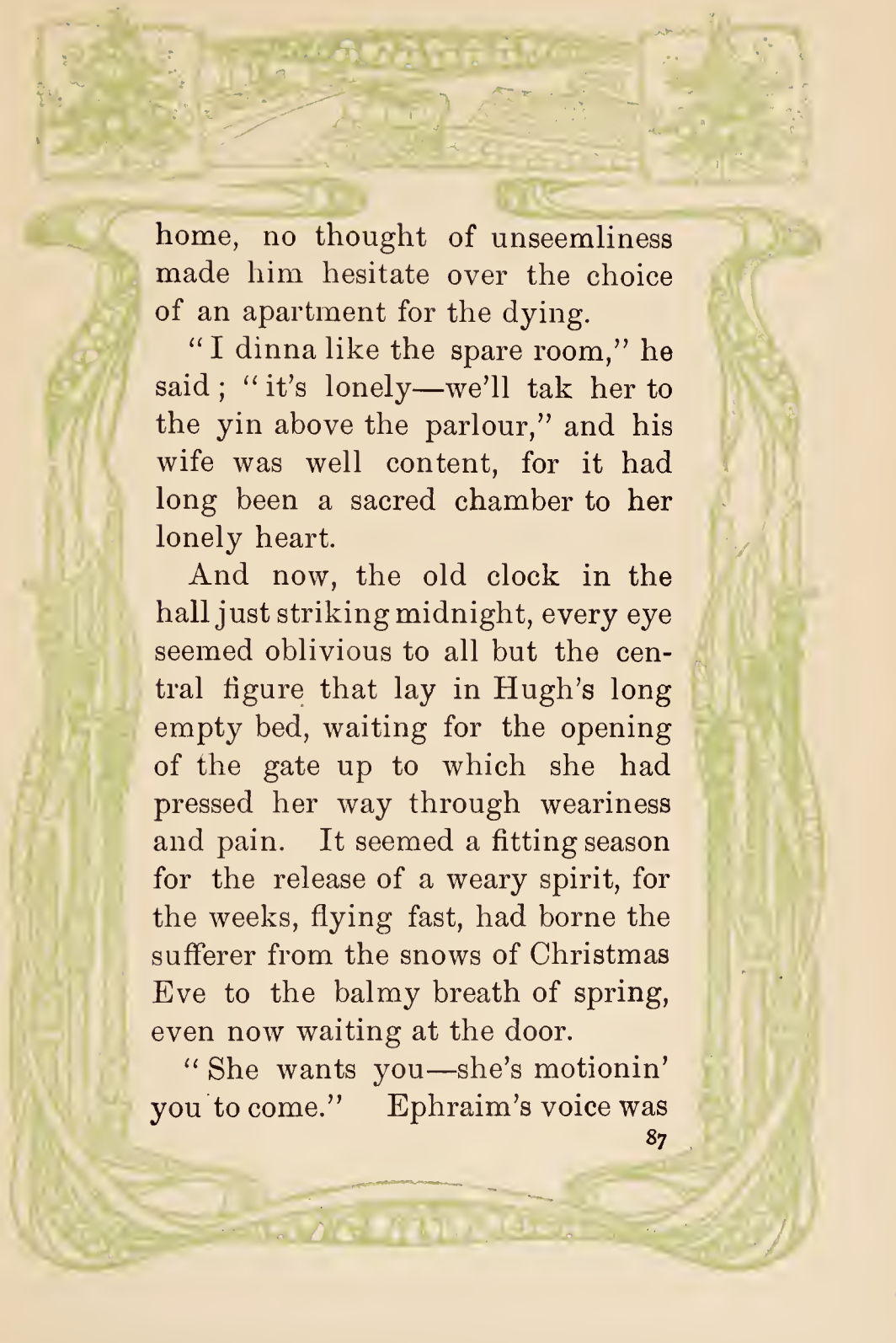


PERHAPS no one noticed it; but the incongruity was plain enough if one took the pains to look. For the walls of the bedroom were bedecked with many things which betrayed the boyish hands that alone could have hung them there. Coloured plates there were, in high festival of pigment, and many a vivid picture wherewith the Boy's Own Paper had enriched its rejoicing patrons; the gory prowess of red Indians had an honoured place, as had the daring of



a few intrepid hunters, and the chivalry of soldiers clad in glorious vermillion. A pair of boxing gloves, fallen upon evil days of peace, lay ignobly on the mantel; a sword, choicest of boyish treasures, hung suspended from its hook. Two mammoth nests, vocal of silence now, clove to the topmost turrets of the old-fashioned bureau, a string of divers-coloured eggs, dear-won, beneath them—and buckled round the base of one slender pillar was a silver-mounted collar, the lone surviving relic of the lamented canine whose well-loved name it bore.

But all this was unnoticed now; for whose eyes will rest on other things when mortals watch for death? Wherefore, when Ronald Robertson had told his wife how quick the end was hastening, and had, further, expressed his purpose to bring Mrs. Marlatt to his own

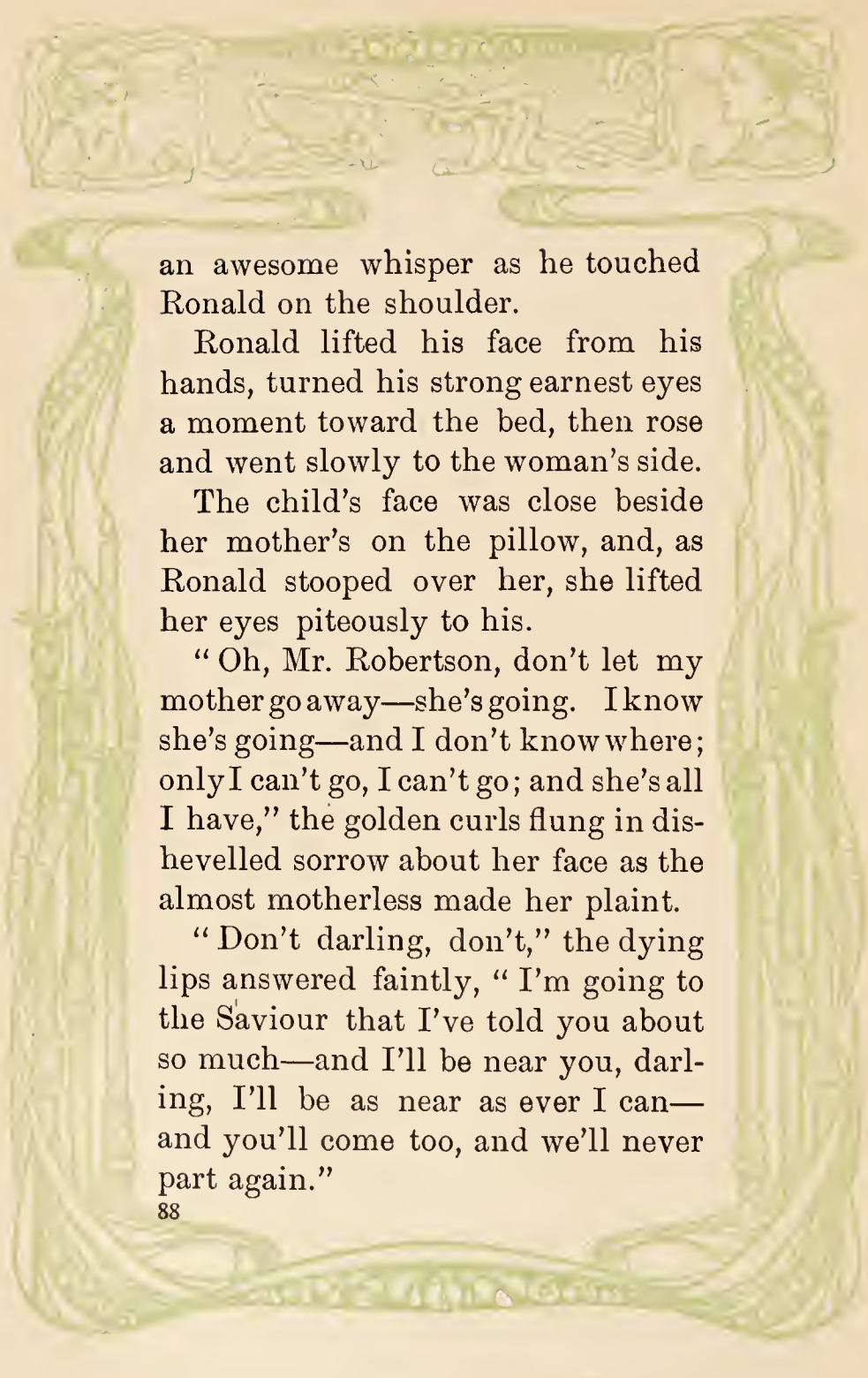


home, no thought of unseemliness made him hesitate over the choice of an apartment for the dying.

"I dinna like the spare room," he said; "it's lonely—we'll tak her to the yin above the parlour," and his wife was well content, for it had long been a sacred chamber to her lonely heart.

And now, the old clock in the hall just striking midnight, every eye seemed oblivious to all but the central figure that lay in Hugh's long empty bed, waiting for the opening of the gate up to which she had pressed her way through weariness and pain. It seemed a fitting season for the release of a weary spirit, for the weeks, flying fast, had borne the sufferer from the snows of Christmas Eve to the balmy breath of spring, even now waiting at the door.

"She wants you—she's motionin' you to come." Ephraim's voice was



an awesome whisper as he touched Ronald on the shoulder.

Ronald lifted his face from his hands, turned his strong earnest eyes a moment toward the bed, then rose and went slowly to the woman's side.

The child's face was close beside her mother's on the pillow, and, as Ronald stooped over her, she lifted her eyes piteously to his.

"Oh, Mr. Robertson, don't let my mother go away—she's going. I know she's going—and I don't know where; only I can't go, I can't go; and she's all I have," the golden curls flung in dishevelled sorrow about her face as the almost motherless made her plaint.

"Don't darling, don't," the dying lips answered faintly, "I'm going to the Saviour that I've told you about so much—and I'll be near you, darling, I'll be as near as ever I can—and you'll come too, and we'll never part again."

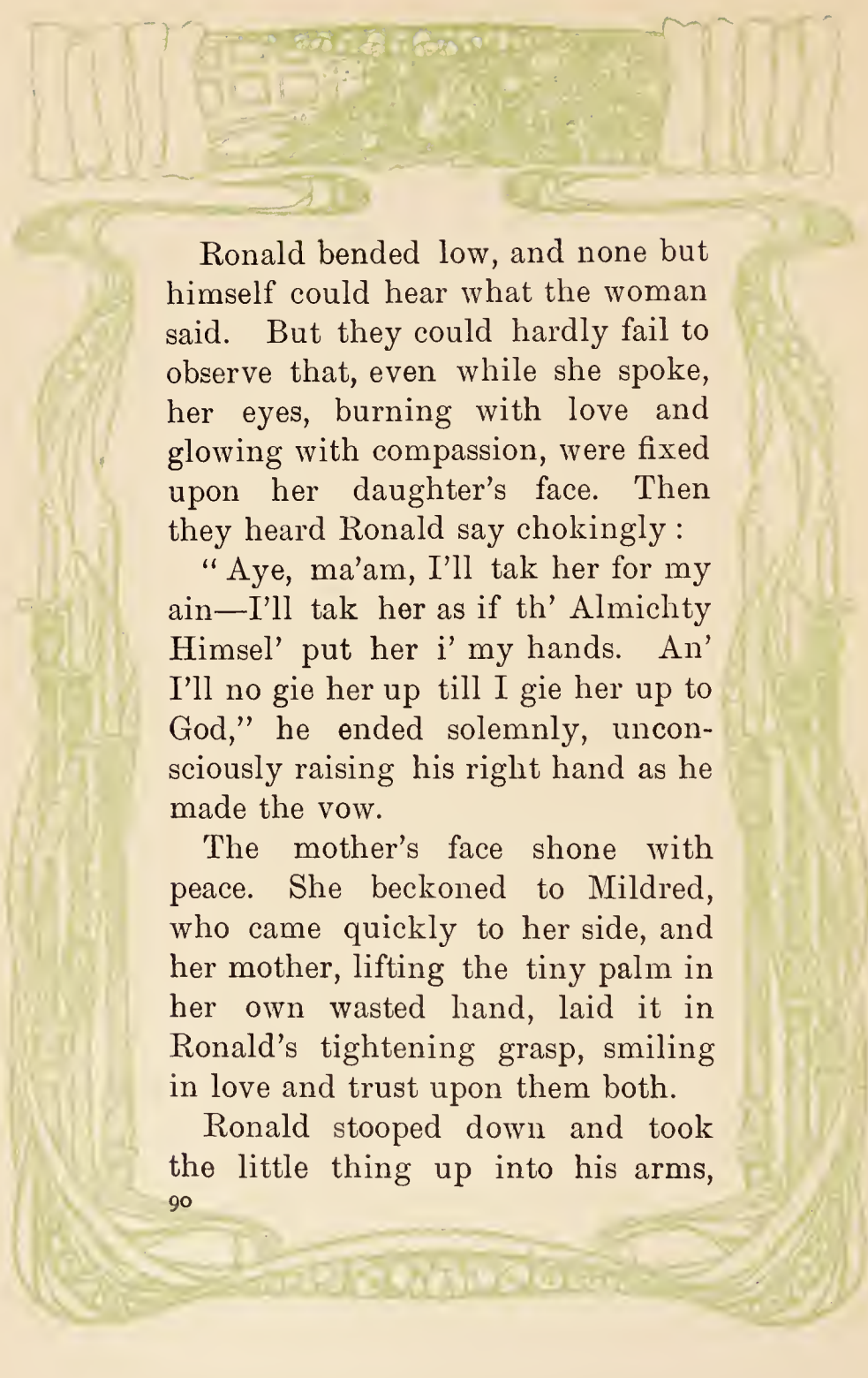
The child's lips quivered, then grew still, as her big eyes filled with wonder, almost with trust, her mind struggling with the wondrous tidings.

"But who'll bring me?" she cried bitterly in a moment; "I don't know the way," the blue eyes overflowing again.

"The Saviour'll bring you," her mother said, fastening her eyes upon her daughter's face.

"Will you tell Him to—will you tell Him how little I am, and I don't know the way, and He mustn't forget?" the girl pleaded eagerly, her lips close to the brooding face beside her.

Young though she was, she could read love's oath in her mother's eyes; and she was content. Very quietly she allowed herself to be drawn away; it was evident her mother wished a word with the man beside the bed.

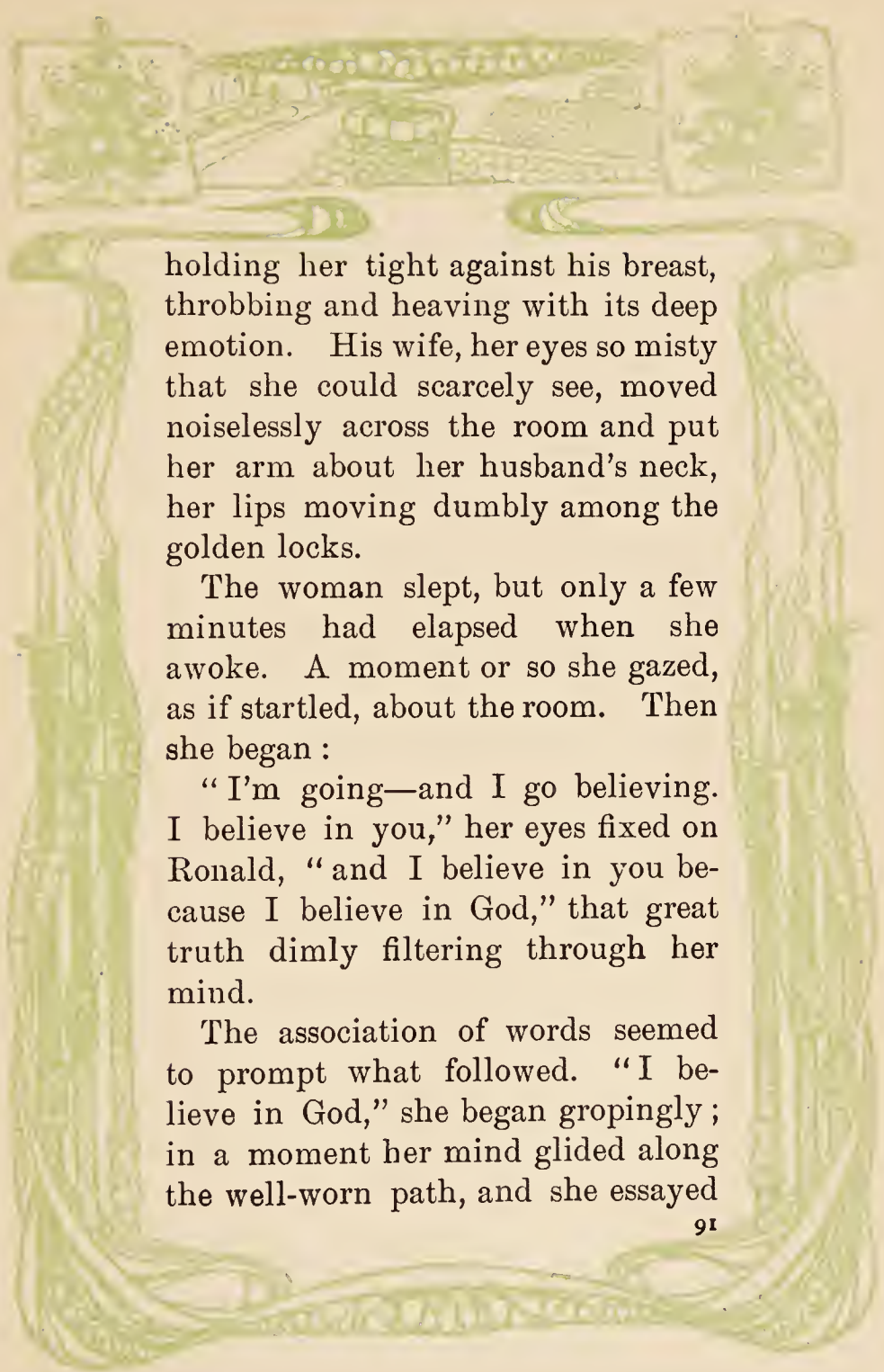


Ronald bended low, and none but himself could hear what the woman said. But they could hardly fail to observe that, even while she spoke, her eyes, burning with love and glowing with compassion, were fixed upon her daughter's face. Then they heard Ronald say chokingly :

“Aye, ma'am, I'll tak her for my ain—I'll tak her as if th' Almichty Himsel' put her i' my hands. An' I'll no gie her up till I gie her up to God,” he ended solemnly, unconsciously raising his right hand as he made the vow.

The mother's face shone with peace. She beckoned to Mildred, who came quickly to her side, and her mother, lifting the tiny palm in her own wasted hand, laid it in Ronald's tightening grasp, smiling in love and trust upon them both.

Ronald stooped down and took the little thing up into his arms,



holding her tight against his breast, throbbing and heaving with its deep emotion. His wife, her eyes so misty that she could scarcely see, moved noiselessly across the room and put her arm about her husband's neck, her lips moving dumbly among the golden locks.

The woman slept, but only a few minutes had elapsed when she awoke. A moment or so she gazed, as if startled, about the room. Then she began :

"I'm going—and I go believing. I believe in you," her eyes fixed on Ronald, "and I believe in you because I believe in God," that great truth dimly filtering through her mind.

The association of words seemed to prompt what followed. "I believe in God," she began gropingly ; in a moment her mind glided along the well-worn path, and she essayed

again the Apostles' Creed, that mighty confession she had made her own long before she knew its wondrous import. "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord." As the holy title broke from the dying lips, she bowed her head upon the pillow; her eyes were closed, but there was at least one royal heart among the breathless worshippers that did homage to the royal heart outgoing—and Ronald bowed his head in reverence and love before the Blessed Name.

Soon she opened her eyes again, roving an instant among the three who kept the sacred vigil. But they settled themselves on Ronald, now standing at the foot of the bed, the child's tired head resting on his shoulder. He could see the filmy insignia of death already sealing the eyes that still poured out their mes-

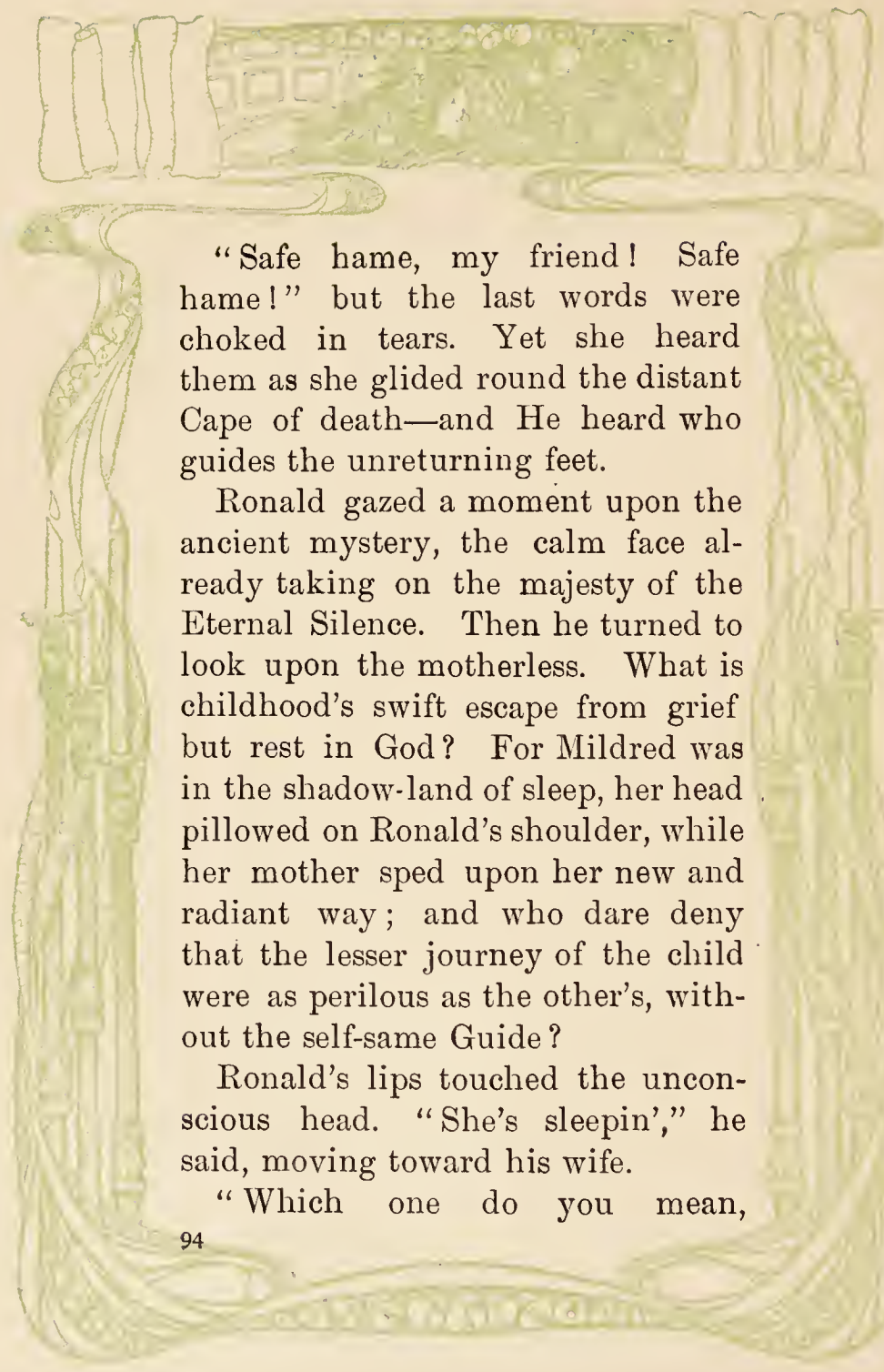
sage of love and confidence; and he smiled back his promise to keep the trust.

He felt that he should speak some word—he had never stood beside a deathbed with such a word unspoken. Hesitatingly he began :

“ Yea, though I walk through death’s dark
vale
Yet will I fear none ill,— ”

He recited to its close the great ritual wherewith the ministers of his Kirk were ever wont to uplift the parting soul. The dying eyes brightened at the noble words, probably never heard before; a moment later, the vital spark was speeding.

Ronald stood at the foot of the bed, his tall form straightened now, his eyes aglow with faith, his whole demeanour that of a priest of God. Shading his eyes with his right hand a moment, he suddenly lifted it high, pointing upward as he cried aloud :



“Safe hame, my friend! Safe hame!” but the last words were choked in tears. Yet she heard them as she glided round the distant Cape of death—and He heard who guides the unreturning feet.

Ronald gazed a moment upon the ancient mystery, the calm face already taking on the majesty of the Eternal Silence. Then he turned to look upon the motherless. What is childhood’s swift escape from grief but rest in God? For Mildred was in the shadow-land of sleep, her head pillowed on Ronald’s shoulder, while her mother sped upon her new and radiant way; and who dare deny that the lesser journey of the child were as perilous as the other’s, without the self-same Guide?

Ronald’s lips touched the unconscious head. “She’s sleepin’,” he said, moving toward his wife.

“Which one do you mean,

Ronald?" his wife whispered gently.

"I mean them baith," Ronald answered reverently; "only the nicht's no past for the bairn yet."

Then he carried her into the adjoining room and laid her on their own bed.

"Ye maun sleep wi' her the nicht, Mary," he said, his voice very low; "I canna dae what I promised, wi'oot yir help. We'll baith keep her till we gie her up to God. An' yir—yir arms hae been empty lang," with which he turned and went swiftly from the room.

His wife groped her way to a clothes-chest in the corner. It was dark—but in a moment she brought forth a tiny nightgown, anointed with the tears that fell hot and fast; then she sank beside the bed and renewed the age-old vows that are so precious to the mothers' God.



The Surgery of the Soul

“**Y**ES, Ronald, your crops never looked better, as you say; it seems hard lines for a man with your wealth to be so poor,” and there was a curious light in Ephraim’s gray eyes as he looked out on the fields of living green about his neighbour’s home. For another season was already demanding its accustomed place.

“ I dinna understand ye—ye dinna ken what ye’re talkin’ aboot. Div ye mean I’m no weel-to-dae?” returned Ronald, no little mortifica-

tion in his voice. "I'm no a Rothschild—but I'm no a pauper, mind ye."

Ephraim's eyes rested thoughtfully on his friend. "You've got all kinds of money—all kinds of it, I know; but I wouldn't call you rich—I wouldn't even call you well-off. Not by no means! You see, Ronnie, it's like this—I don't call a feller rich that's got lots o' money. Lots of men of means is mighty mean men—you're not, Ronnie, not an inch of you," he hastened to explain; "but there's several kinds of riches—a man's rich if he's got a good upper story," tapping his brow in illustration; "an' he's richer if he's got good friends; an' he's richer still if he's got them round him as loves him—children mostly, I reckon. An' then, unless the preachers is all fools, he's richest of all if he's got—if he's got that, you know. I'm not quite a millionaire

in that line myself," and Ephraim smiled at the open-mouthed listener as he concluded his estimate.

"Ye're a lad, Ephraim," was Ronald's not very enlightening response. "What class wud ye pit the likes o' me in?"

Ephraim grinned significantly. "You're powerful poor, Ronnie—you're mighty nigh a bankrupt. Was you at the Sacrament yesterday, Ronnie? I heard you was."

Ronald, wide-eyed, had to close his mouth before he could begin his answer.

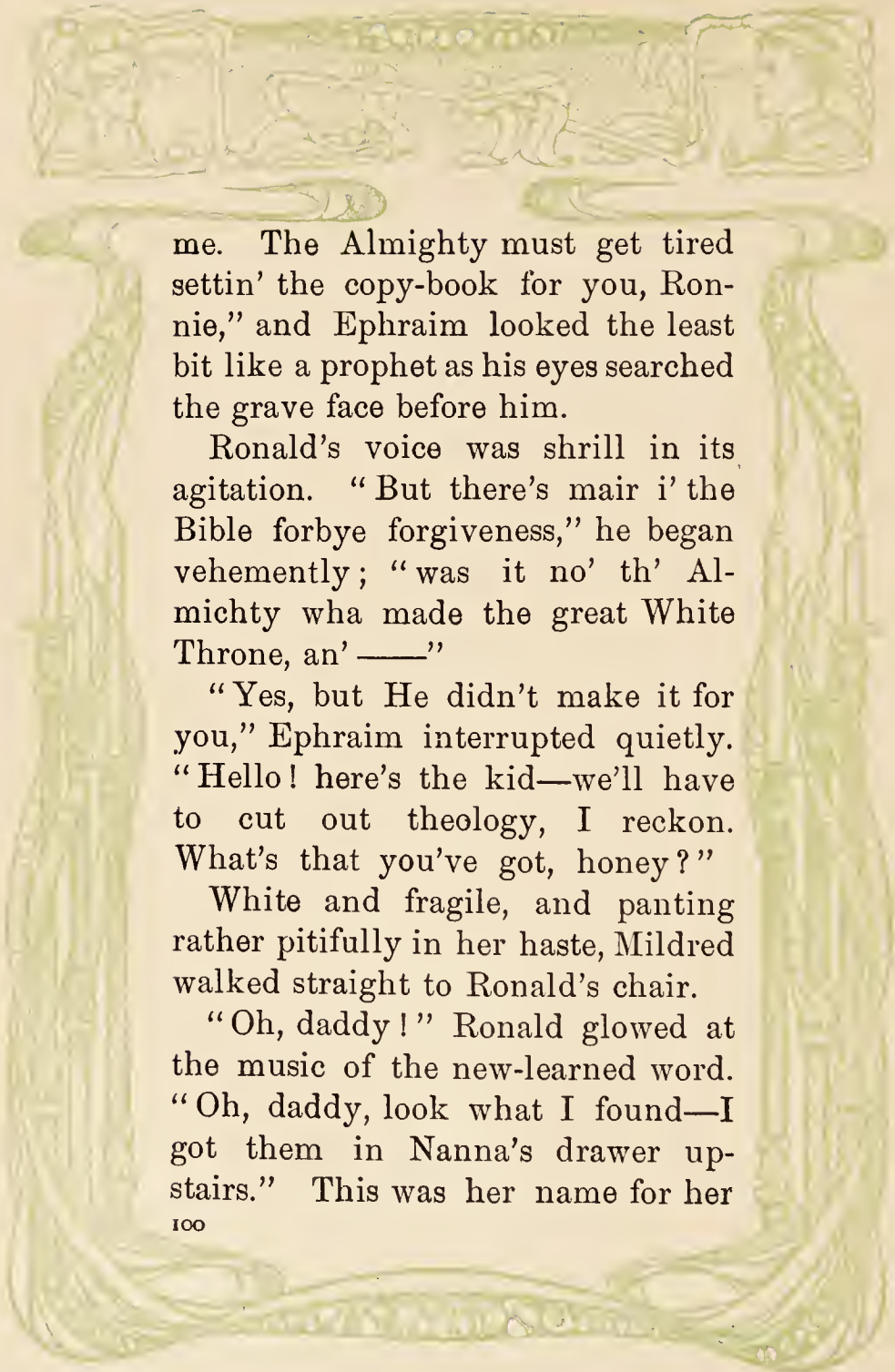
"Aye," he replied, staring at his questioner. "I went wi' the wife—she was frettin'. What has the Saicrament to dae wi' riches?"

"Just this much. I never went to a Sacrament; but if I did, an' if I didn't get grace enough to forgive one poor lad that happened to make a break, and afterwards got mad and

called me a liar, I'd—I'd think I was cheated out o' my boots. I'd feel like I was Rothschild—to take the man you mentioned—bein' turned into a pauper. I'm goin' to tell you something, Ronnie—d'ye want to hear it?"

"Aye, I dinna mind." Ronald was just a little pale; he looked as if he could have denied himself the information cheerfully enough.

"Well then, I will. D'ye know, sometimes I think I might go to the Sacrament, if I ever felt good enough—an' if you'd forgive Hugh. But it don't seem to be fixin' you up, Ronnie; it don't seem to be deliverin' the goods. This goin' there an' gettin' forgiven yourself all the time, just as if God had nuthin' else to do, just as if that was His trade—an' then not tryin' even to be a 'prentice at the business yourself—it don't seem catchin' enough to suit



me. The Almighty must get tired settin' the copy-book for you, Ronnie," and Ephraim looked the least bit like a prophet as his eyes searched the grave face before him.

Ronald's voice was shrill in its agitation. "But there's mair i' the Bible forbye forgiveness," he began vehemently; "was it no' th' Almighty wha made the great White Throne, an' ——"

"Yes, but He didn't make it for you," Ephraim interrupted quietly. "Hello! here's the kid—we'll have to cut out theology, I reckon. What's that you've got, honey?"

White and fragile, and panting rather pitifully in her haste, Mildred walked straight to Ronald's chair.

"Oh, daddy!" Ronald glowed at the music of the new-learned word. "Oh, daddy, look what I found—I got them in Nanna's drawer upstairs." This was her name for her

foster-mother. "It bounces nearly to the ceiling," wherewith she flung the ball upon the floor, catching it as it descended; "and I wish you'd tie up the handle on this whip—it's ravelled; and just listen," putting the whistle to her lips and blowing till the room rang with the sound. "Whose are they, daddy? were they yours?"

Ronald's lips were firm; but his eyes turned traitors, dim and dewy as they were. He did not look at Ephraim.

"I'll fix the whup—gie't me."

"But whose are they, daddy?"

A pause intervened. "Thae was—thae was my son's," he said, almost unheard.

"Your son! What's his name?"

"His name was Hugh, lassie," Ronald said slowly.

"What's his name now?" the child asked instantly.

"It's—it's still Hugh. Thae toys was his."

"Whose are they now, daddy?"

"They're—they're his, lassie."

"Where is he, daddy?" the eager face upturned.

"He's—he's awa'."

"Was Nanna his mother?"

"Aye; aye, lassie."

"Then she's his mother yet?" the serious face aglow with interest.

Ronald's voice shook in spite of all his efforts. "Aye, Mildred, aye, she's his mither yet."

"Then why doesn't he come home?" she asked in a perplexed tone.

Ronald cast about sorely in his mind, gazing down the while upon the beautiful inquisitor, all unconscious as she was of the fresh-bleeding wound.

"Ye—ye wudna unnerstand," he evaded.

"Do you understand, daddy?"

"Aye," he answered sadly, "nae-body unnerstands only me."

"Doesn't Nanna understand?"

Ronald hesitated. "I dinna think, sae."

"Doesn't God understand, daddy?"

Ronald gazed in startled silence; but Ephraim volunteered the answer for which the child was waiting.

"No honey, He don't—there isn't nobody finds it as hard to understand as Him. Come on out into the yard," he suddenly digressed; "I want to see the bees," and, lifting the child to his shoulder, he strode out into the sunlight, Ronald musing still within the shadow.

The remainder of the afternoon Ronald spent among the glistening fields, whitening to the harvest; he had much to think upon. And his troubled mind was still thus em-

ployed as he sat amid the gloaming, when his wife slipped into the room and took her place beside him.

"Ronald," she began, "something very beautiful occurred to-night. Oh! she's the sweetest child!" a wealth of devotion in the words. "Father," she went on, the tone touched with anxious care, "why don't you take Mildred to the specialist in the city? Don't you think she's growing weaker, father? She tires so easily—and she's coughing more. If I could only know it isn't serious! But I often think—what do you think, father?" she concluded eagerly.

Ronald's eyes were troubled. "I canna deny the lassie's no what she micht be. I dinna like thae red spots on the bonnie cheeks. But the simmer'll dae her guid, I'm hopin'," he added, summoning a cheerful note. "But what's this the wee

girlie's been daein' the day?—ye said it was something beautifu'," he quoted, glad to abandon the darker topic.

His wife moved closer. "It was lovely, Ronald. I noticed how quiet and thoughtful she had been all evening; but to-night, when she said her little prayer to me, after she was all through, she turned her face up to mine: 'I want to pray about Hugh,' she said; 'I want God to bring him home to you and daddy. I'm sure He doesn't want Hugh to stay away any more—and I'm sure He doesn't like daddy to be so lonely.' And," the now broken voice went on, "she prayed the sweetest little prayer. Oh, father," taking his face in both her hands, the glistening eyes appealing to him through the dusk, "don't you mind how our Hugh used to kneel just like that?—you used to steal up-

stairs to watch him, father! It seems so long ago—and it was so sweet, father; take me, Ronald,” and the quivering form stole into his arms.

Ronald fought his fight in silence. “Ye canna think I dinna mind,” he said at length, huskily. “I mind ilka hair o’ his heid. But there’s mair, tae, as I canna forget till my deen’ day. Ye dinna understand the Scottish natur’, Mary—we’re taught, frae we was bairns, to gie up chick an’ child afore we coontenance a sin; the prodigals maun aye repent an’ turn,” he concluded, the ancestral spirit of his race ringing in his voice.

His wife rested silent in his arms a minute. “Do you ever pray for him too, dear?” she asked in a gentle voice.

“Aye, lass; oh, aye, I pray he’ll be forgiven o’ his sin—isna that

Mildred callin'? I'll gang till her mysel'," with which, clearing a very troublesome throat as he went, Ronald made a dignified escape. But his wife did not abate the siege; her lips still moved in pleading, but now their plaint was turned toward the all-pitying Heart.



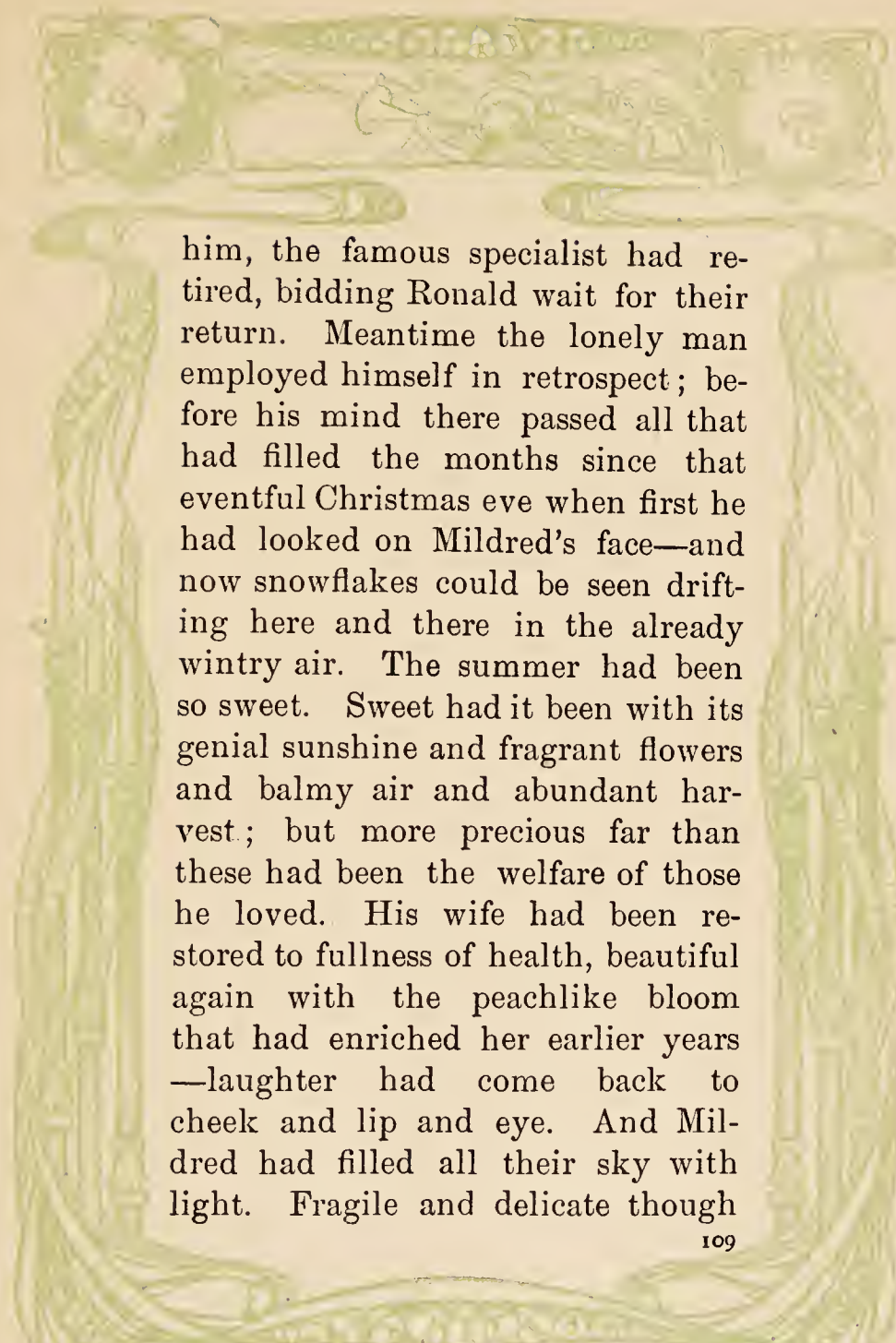


The Doctor's Verdict

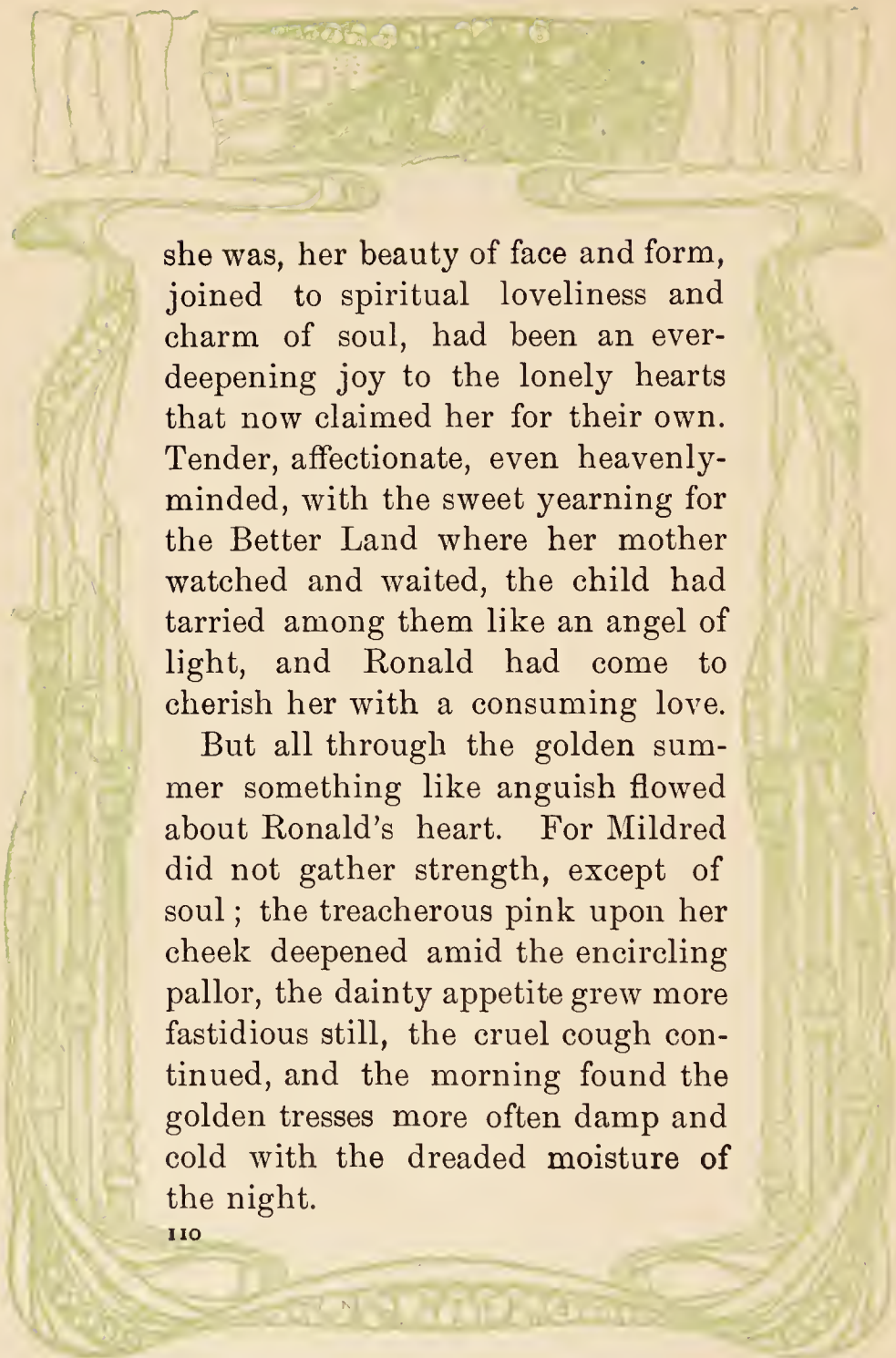


HE changing scene had little charm for Roland this late autumn day as he gazed from the doctor's window upon the busy street of the near-by city. The vehicles of commerce rumbled on their way, resplendent carriages told of wealth and station as they hurried by, and innumerable pedestrians jostled one another in selfish haste—but Ronald stared through the window with unseeing eyes.

For his heart was in an adjoining room, to which, taking Mildred with

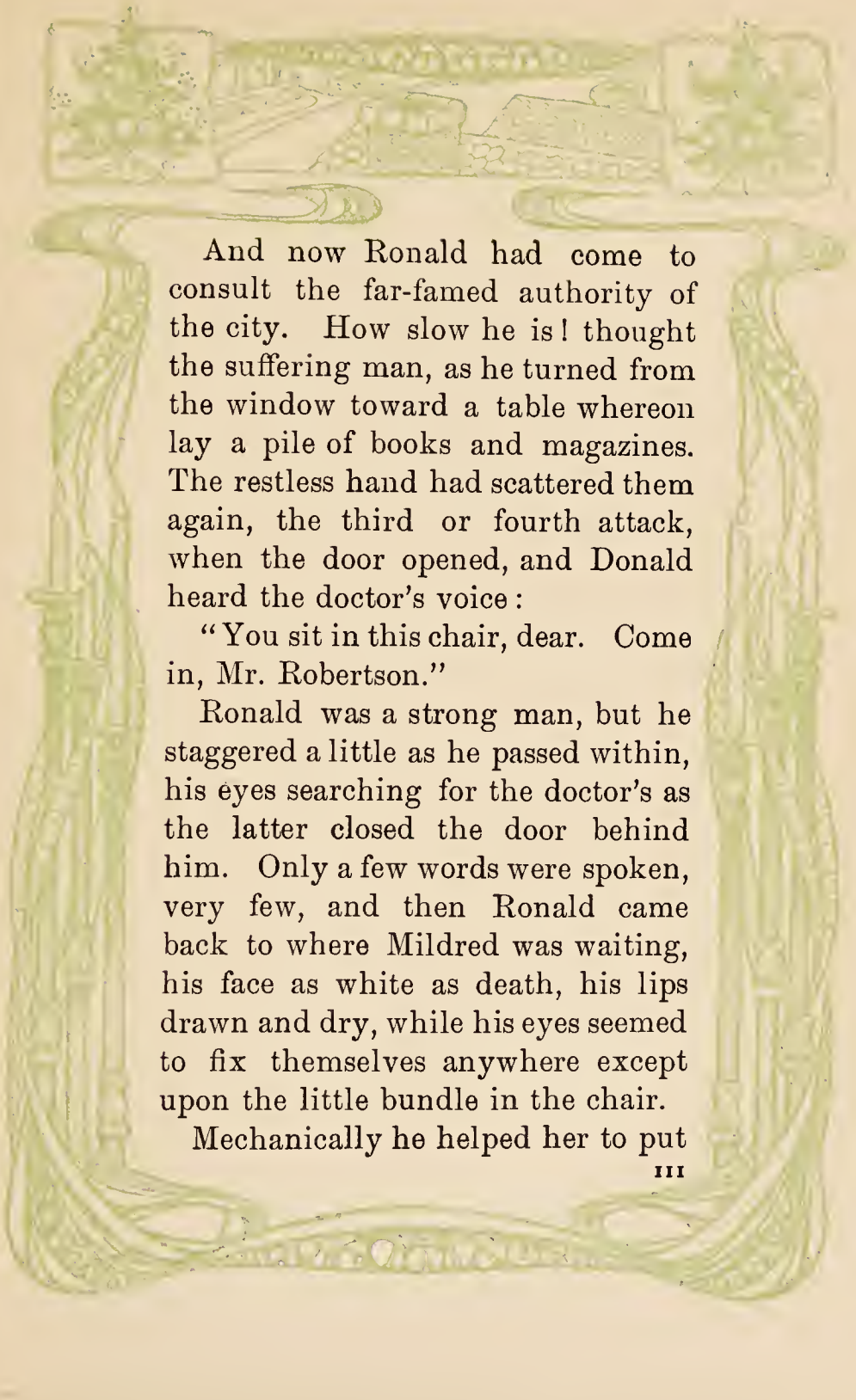


him, the famous specialist had retired, bidding Ronald wait for their return. Meantime the lonely man employed himself in retrospect; before his mind there passed all that had filled the months since that eventful Christmas eve when first he had looked on Mildred's face—and now snowflakes could be seen drifting here and there in the already wintry air. The summer had been so sweet. Sweet had it been with its genial sunshine and fragrant flowers and balmy air and abundant harvest; but more precious far than these had been the welfare of those he loved. His wife had been restored to fullness of health, beautiful again with the peachlike bloom that had enriched her earlier years—laughter had come back to cheek and lip and eye. And Mildred had filled all their sky with light. Fragile and delicate though



she was, her beauty of face and form, joined to spiritual loveliness and charm of soul, had been an ever-deepening joy to the lonely hearts that now claimed her for their own. Tender, affectionate, even heavenly-minded, with the sweet yearning for the Better Land where her mother watched and waited, the child had tarried among them like an angel of light, and Ronald had come to cherish her with a consuming love.

But all through the golden summer something like anguish flowed about Ronald's heart. For Mildred did not gather strength, except of soul; the treacherous pink upon her cheek deepened amid the encircling pallor, the dainty appetite grew more fastidious still, the cruel cough continued, and the morning found the golden tresses more often damp and cold with the dreaded moisture of the night.



And now Ronald had come to consult the far-famed authority of the city. How slow he is! thought the suffering man, as he turned from the window toward a table whereon lay a pile of books and magazines. The restless hand had scattered them again, the third or fourth attack, when the door opened, and Donald heard the doctor's voice:

"You sit in this chair, dear. Come in, Mr. Robertson."

Ronald was a strong man, but he staggered a little as he passed within, his eyes searching for the doctor's as the latter closed the door behind him. Only a few words were spoken, very few, and then Ronald came back to where Mildred was waiting, his face as white as death, his lips drawn and dry, while his eyes seemed to fix themselves anywhere except upon the little bundle in the chair.

Mechanically he helped her to put

on her wraps, the doctor discoursing genially the while upon deep breathing and sea-salt baths in the morning, his counsel falling like so much idle prattle upon Ronald's ears. And as the latter passed without the door he turned and shook hands with the smiling doctor, almost smiling himself at the unnaturalness of the act. Then he walked dumbly down the street, Mildred swinging by his arm as she gazed this way and that at the myriad wonders of the city.

"I'm tired," the child said presently ; "don't let us walk any more."

The words cut his heart now like a knife, though he had often heard them before.

"Say, 'I'm tired, daddy,'" his words coming thick.

"Oh, yes ; I always forget, don't I—dear old daddy," said the child ; "you look tired too."

Ronald hailed a carriage and they

drove rapidly to the station. Once in the car, the little one soon fell asleep, her head pillowed on Ronald's arm; and he ate the bitter herbs of sorrow as he gazed down on the unconscious face. The dusk was about them when she awoke.

"I've had such a lovely dream," she said as she sat upright.

"Did ye, Mildred?" said Ronald. "What was it?" he asked, smiling bravely, though some strange fear possessed him.

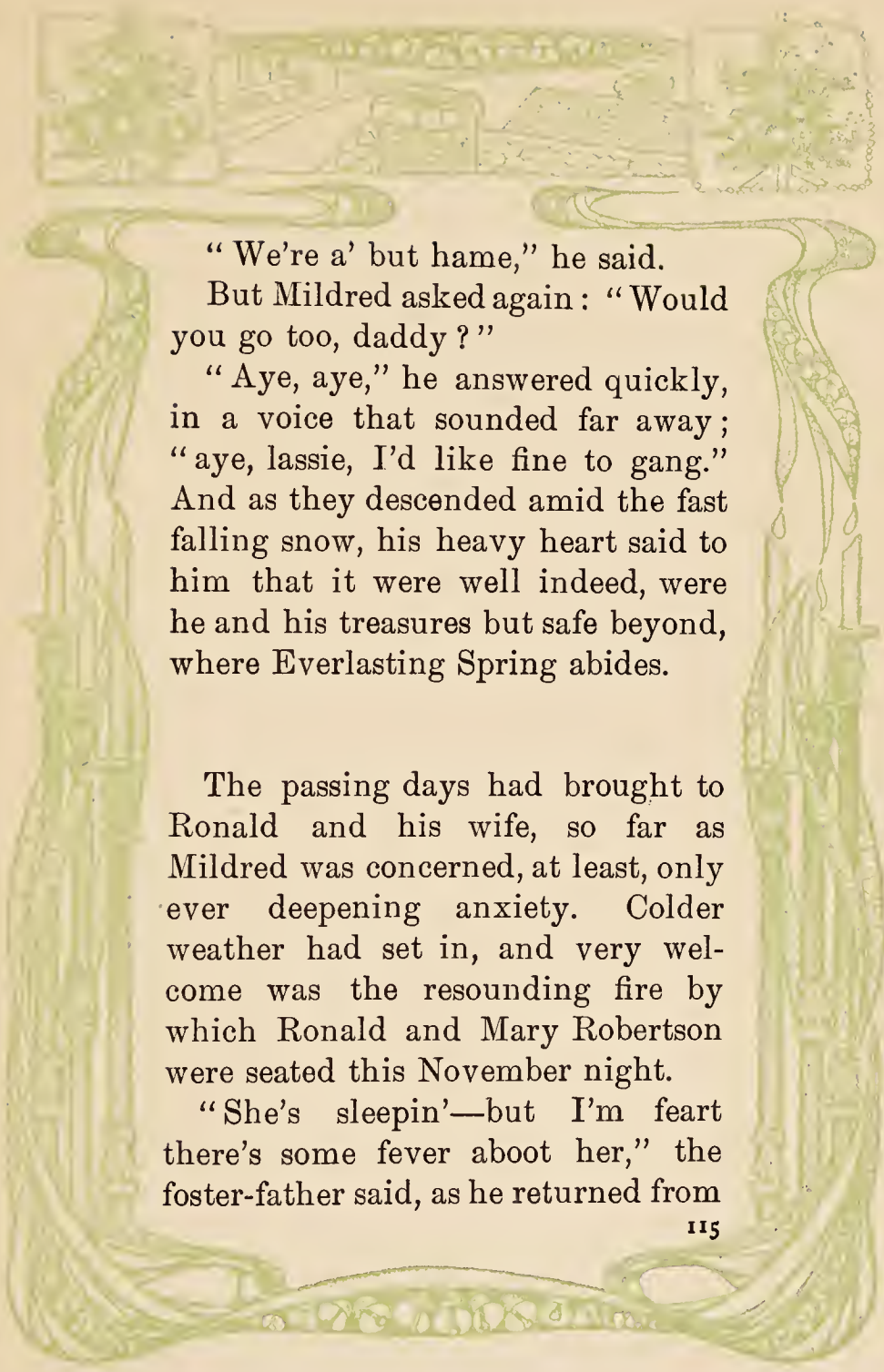
"I saw my mother," she began with the simplicity of childhood. "I dreamed I did, you know—and she looked so happy, and everything was beautiful—only she said she was lonely without me. And I said how beautiful everything was, and she said: 'Mildred, aren't you lonely too?'—and I didn't know what to say. Then she said, 'I want you, Mildred,' or 'darling,' or some name

like that. And I said I'd come if you'd come too, daddy—perhaps I knew I was sleeping on your lap. And she was just taking me in her arms when I woke up. Don't look like that, daddy—you mustn't look like that—why, you're crying," and the pale hand went up impulsively to banish the offending tears.

"It's naethin', lassie,"—the husky voice told how much. "Only I cudna dae wantin' ye."

Mildred was looking out of the window at the scurrying landscape. "Wouldn't it be wonderful," she began slowly, "if I really had to go—and would you come, too, daddy, if I really had to? It was beautiful—would you go, too?" turning her face up to his as she pressed the childish question.

Ronald's averted face bore witness to the storm within as he pretended to pick up the little coat that had fallen to the floor.



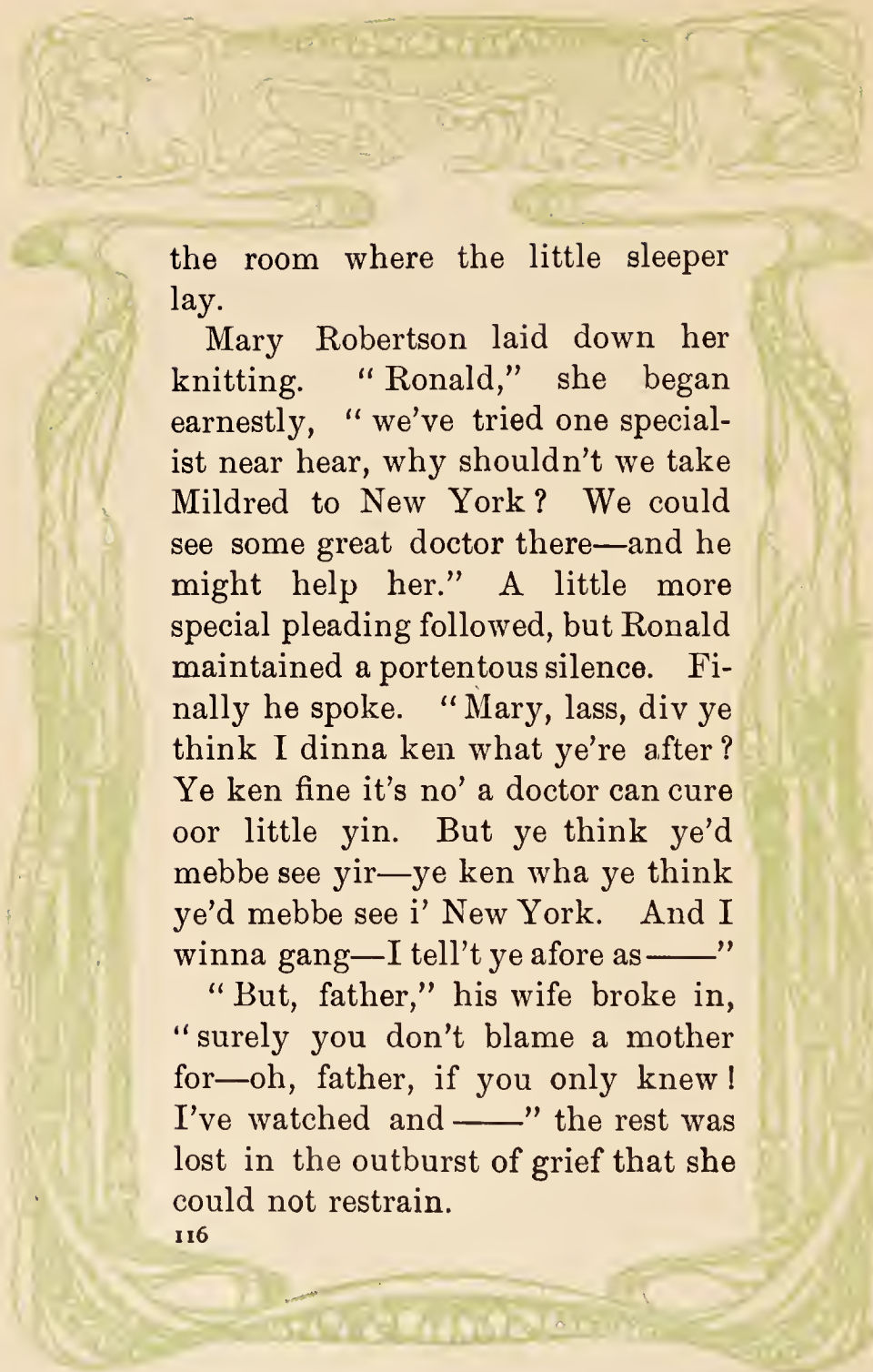
“We’re a’ but hame,” he said.

But Mildred asked again: “Would you go too, daddy?”

“Aye, aye,” he answered quickly, in a voice that sounded far away; “aye, lassie, I’d like fine to gang.” And as they descended amid the fast falling snow, his heavy heart said to him that it were well indeed, were he and his treasures but safe beyond, where Everlasting Spring abides.

The passing days had brought to Ronald and his wife, so far as Mildred was concerned, at least, only ever deepening anxiety. Colder weather had set in, and very welcome was the resounding fire by which Ronald and Mary Robertson were seated this November night.

“She’s sleepin’—but I’m feart there’s some fever aboot her,” the foster-father said, as he returned from



the room where the little sleeper lay.

Mary Robertson laid down her knitting. "Ronald," she began earnestly, "we've tried one specialist near hear, why shouldn't we take Mildred to New York? We could see some great doctor there—and he might help her." A little more special pleading followed, but Ronald maintained a portentous silence. Finally he spoke. "Mary, lass, div ye think I dinna ken what ye're after? Ye ken fine it's no' a doctor can cure oor little yin. But ye think ye'd mebbe see yir—ye ken wha ye think ye'd mebbe see i' New York. And I winna gang—I tell't ye afore as——"

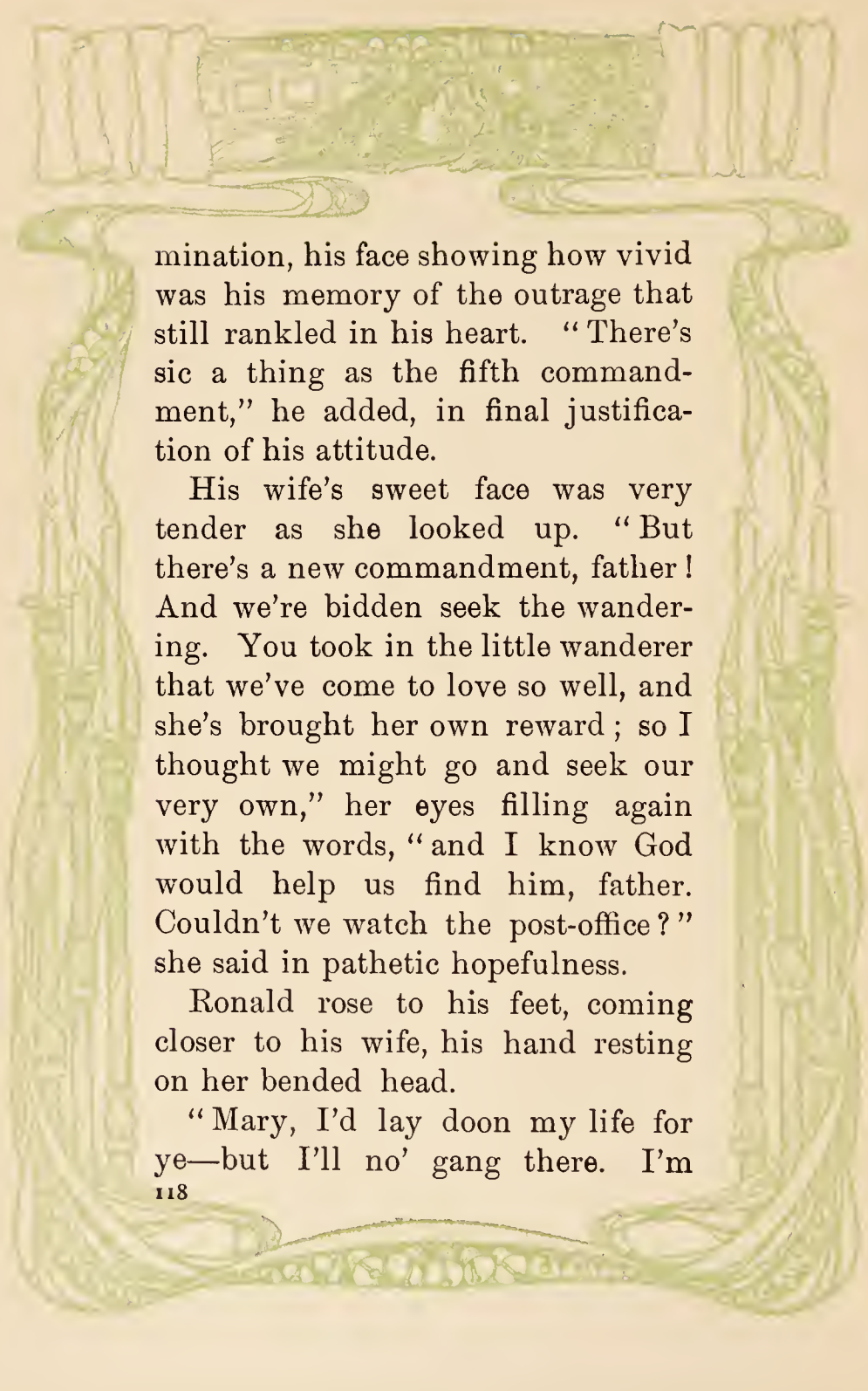
"But, father," his wife broke in, "surely you don't blame a mother for—oh, father, if you only knew! I've watched and ——" the rest was lost in the outburst of grief that she could not restrain.

"I had a letter from Hugh to-day," the mother went on as soon as she could control herself, "and my prayer's been answered—partly answered, father; he says he's got the victory at last. He says he fought it out with help from above, and he's won his fight."

"Did he gie ye his address?" Ronald broke in eagerly. "What's the guid o' talkin' if ye dinna ken where he bides?"

"No—no, he didn't," the woman began slowly, "but he gets my letters—he goes to the post-office, and ——"

"I only thocht we nicht send him a wee bit help—no' that he deserves it, mind ye. But that ither—what he ca'ed me—naebody can mend that but himsel.' There's nae guid o' buildin' on the sand; the Bible itsel' tells us no to dae that," and Ronald set his lips in final deter-

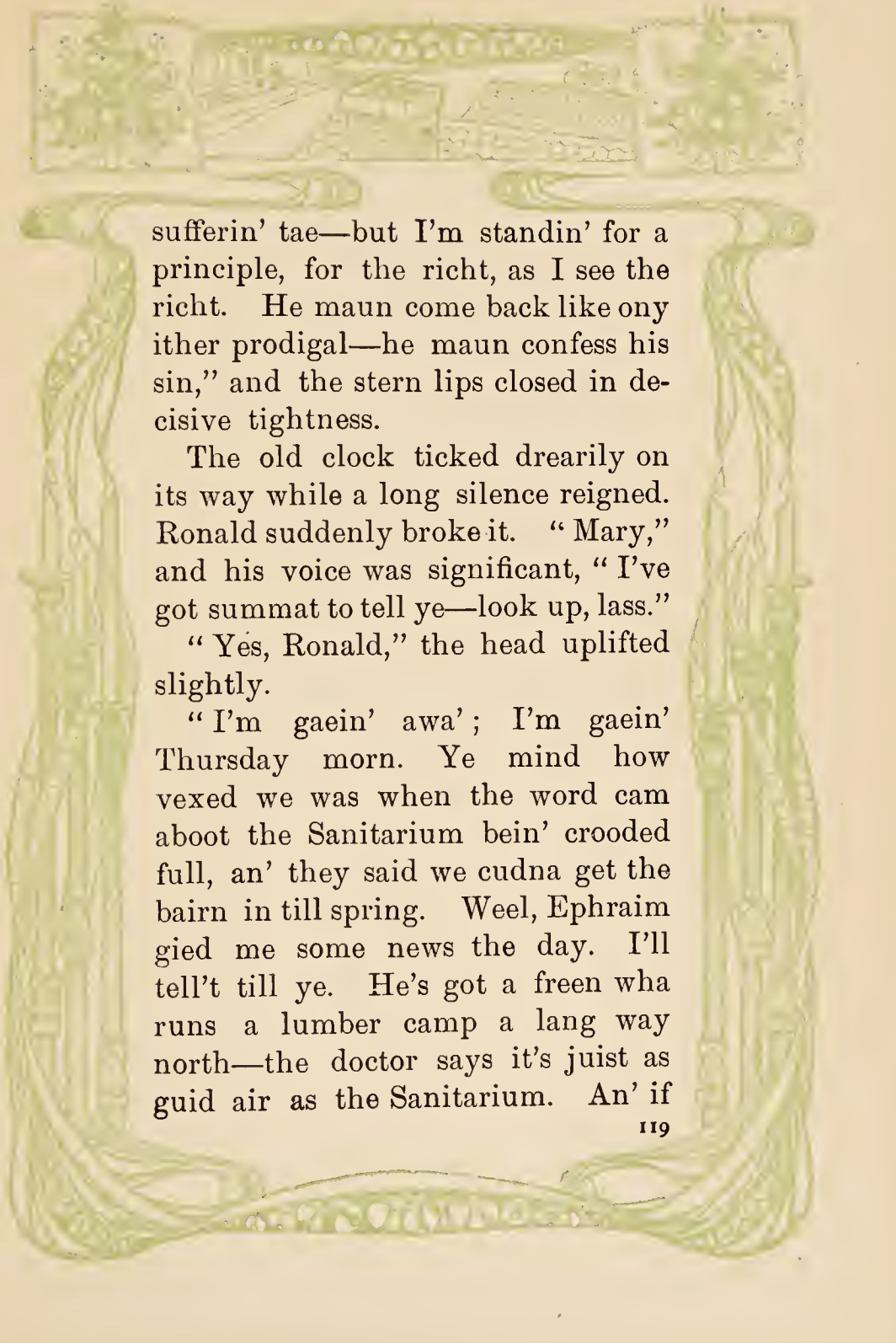


mination, his face showing how vivid was his memory of the outrage that still rankled in his heart. "There's sic a thing as the fifth commandment," he added, in final justification of his attitude.

His wife's sweet face was very tender as she looked up. "But there's a new commandment, father! And we're bidden seek the wandering. You took in the little wanderer that we've come to love so well, and she's brought her own reward; so I thought we might go and seek our very own," her eyes filling again with the words, "and I know God would help us find him, father. Couldn't we watch the post-office?" she said in pathetic hopefulness.

Ronald rose to his feet, coming closer to his wife, his hand resting on her bended head.

"Mary, I'd lay doon my life for ye—but I'll no' gang there. I'm

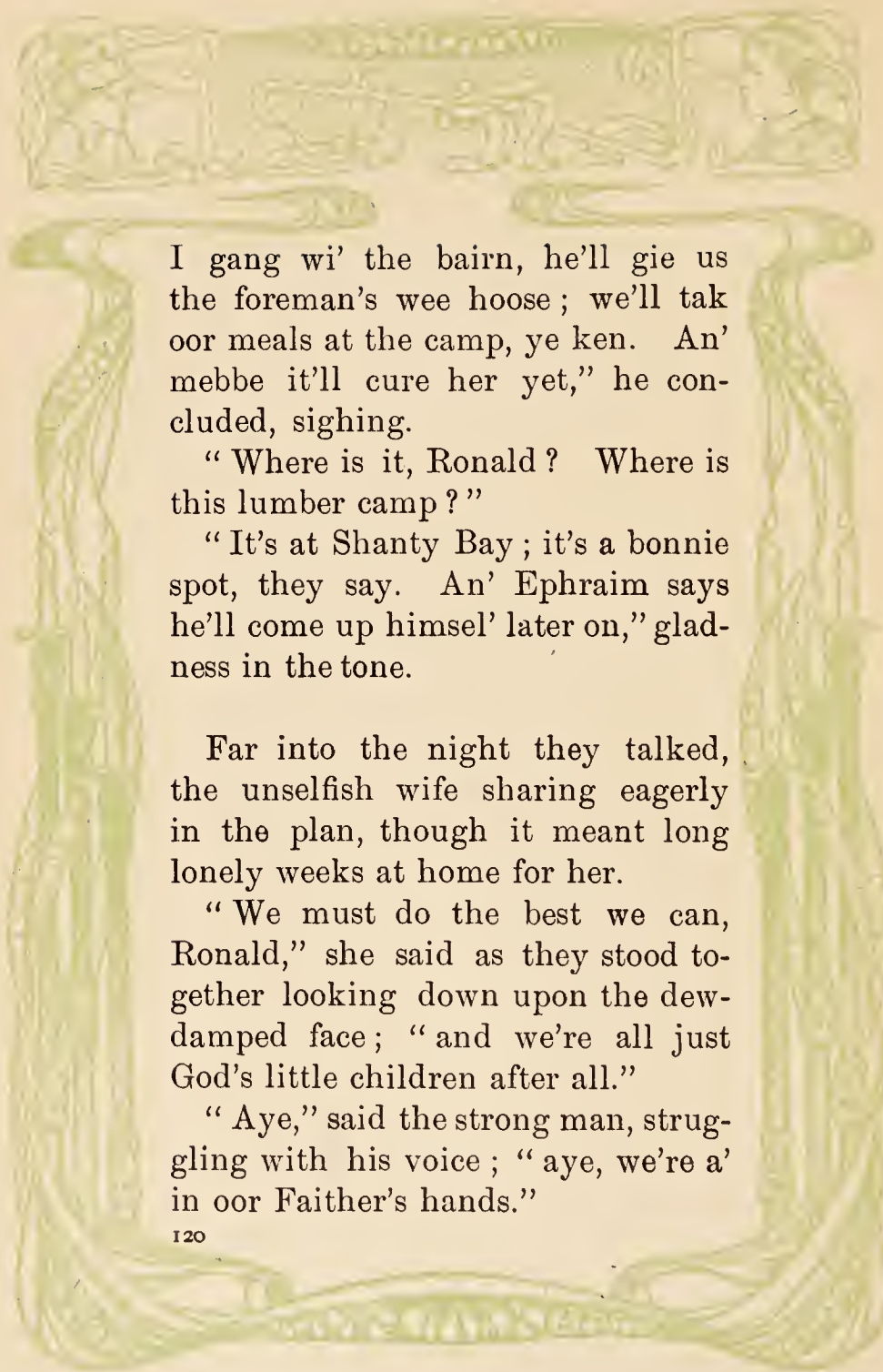


sufferin' tae—but I'm standin' for a principle, for the richt, as I see the richt. He maun come back like ony ither prodigal—he maun confess his sin," and the stern lips closed in decisive tightness.

The old clock ticked drearily on its way while a long silence reigned. Ronald suddenly broke it. "Mary," and his voice was significant, "I've got summat to tell ye—look up, lass."

"Yes, Ronald," the head uplifted slightly.

"I'm gaein' awa'; I'm gaein' Thursday morn. Ye mind how vexed we was when the word cam about the Sanitarium bein' crooded full, an' they said we cudna get the bairn in till spring. Weel, Ephraim gied me some news the day. I'll tell't till ye. He's got a freen wha runs a lumber camp a lang way north—the doctor says it's juist as guid air as the Sanitarium. An' if



I gang wi' the bairn, he'll gie us the foreman's wee hoose ; we'll tak oor meals at the camp, ye ken. An' mebbe it'll cure her yet," he concluded, sighing.

"Where is it, Ronald ? Where is this lumber camp ?"

"It's at Shanty Bay ; it's a bonnie spot, they say. An' Ephraim says he'll come up himsel' later on," gladness in the tone.

Far into the night they talked, the unselfish wife sharing eagerly in the plan, though it meant long lonely weeks at home for her.

"We must do the best we can, Ronald," she said as they stood together looking down upon the dew-damped face ; "and we're all just God's little children after all."

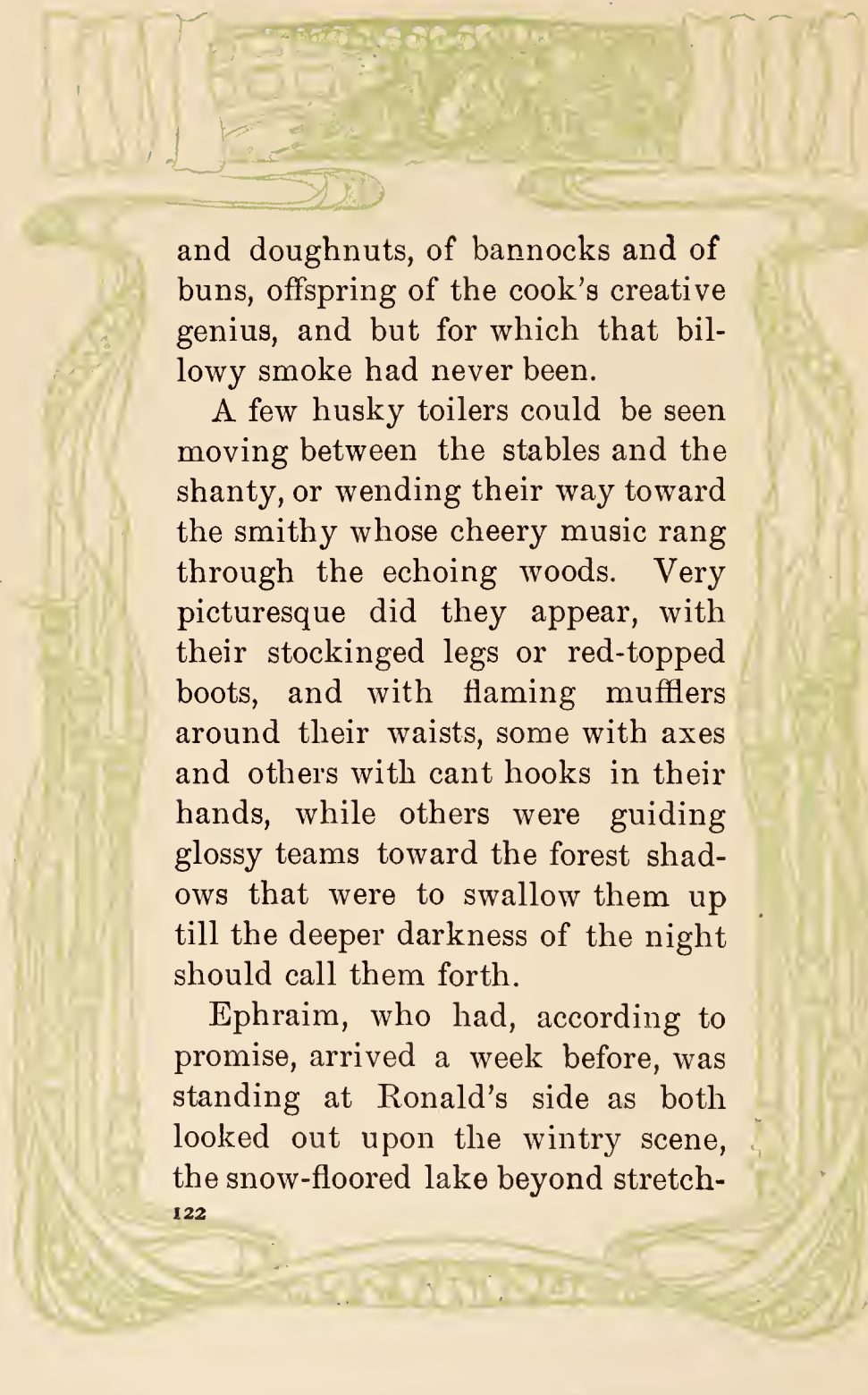
"Aye," said the strong man, struggling with his voice ; "aye, we're a' in oor Faither's hands."



Pilgrims of the Night



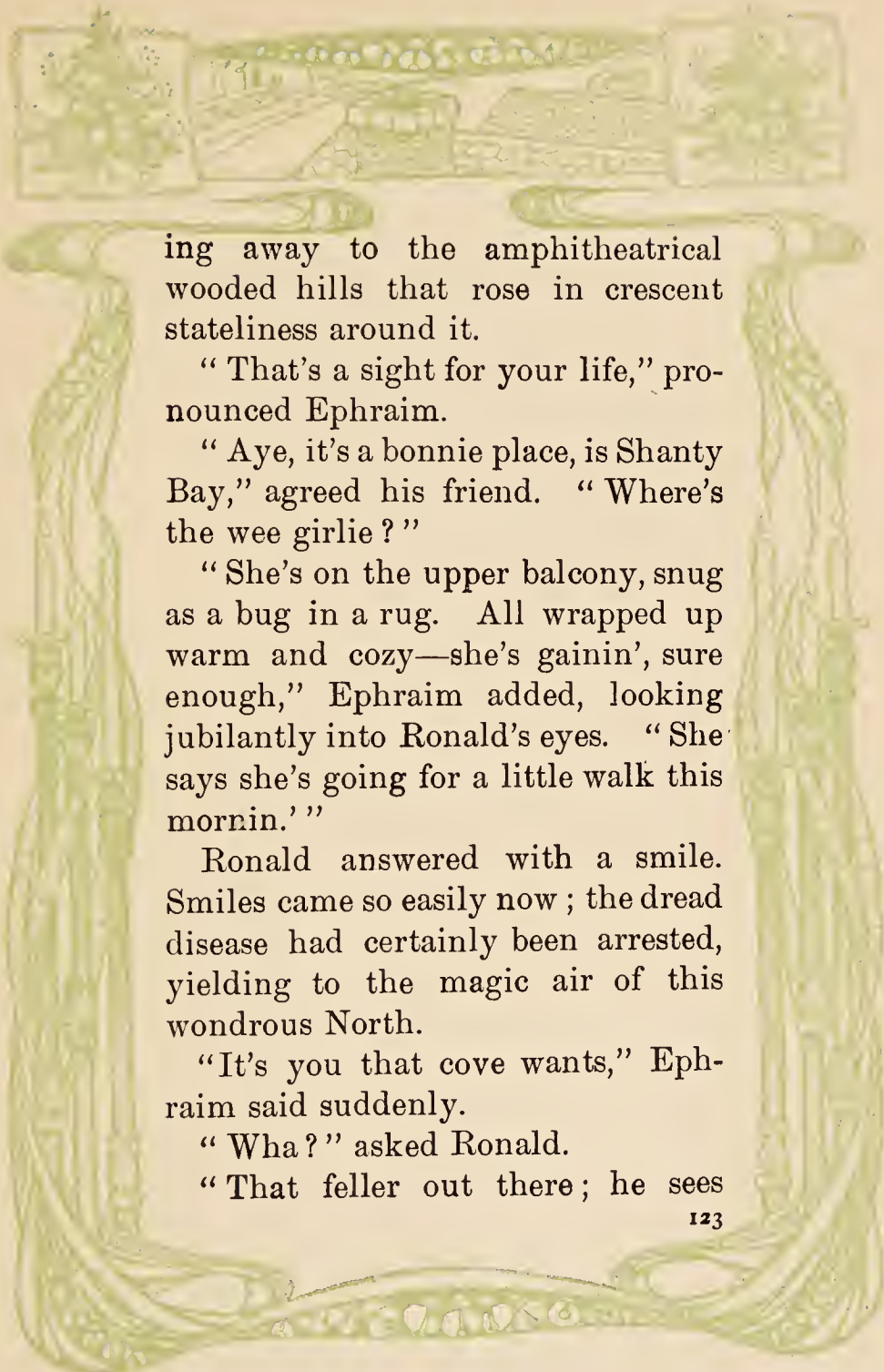
IT was once again the day before Christmas ; how different from the last, Ronald could not but think as he looked out from the cozy cabin upon the scene that stretched before him at Shanty Bay. The spacious lumber camp, built of rough logs, was little more than a hundred yards away, its snow-clad roof relieved only by the out-jutting stovepipe from which the smoke seemed to be tossed so merrily, as if conscious of the wealth of pork and beans, of pies



and doughnuts, of bannocks and of buns, offspring of the cook's creative genius, and but for which that billowy smoke had never been.

A few husky toilers could be seen moving between the stables and the shanty, or wending their way toward the smithy whose cheery music rang through the echoing woods. Very picturesque did they appear, with their stockinged legs or red-topped boots, and with flaming mufflers around their waists, some with axes and others with cant hooks in their hands, while others were guiding glossy teams toward the forest shadows that were to swallow them up till the deeper darkness of the night should call them forth.

Ephraim, who had, according to promise, arrived a week before, was standing at Ronald's side as both looked out upon the wintry scene, the snow-floored lake beyond stretch-



ing away to the amphitheatrical wooded hills that rose in crescent stateliness around it.

“That’s a sight for your life,” pronounced Ephraim.

“Aye, it’s a bonnie place, is Shanty Bay,” agreed his friend. “Where’s the wee girlie?”

“She’s on the upper balcony, snug as a bug in a rug. All wrapped up warm and cozy—she’s gainin’, sure enough,” Ephraim added, looking jubilantly into Ronald’s eyes. “She says she’s going for a little walk this mornin.’”

Ronald answered with a smile. Smiles came so easily now; the dread disease had certainly been arrested, yielding to the magic air of this wondrous North.

“It’s you that cove wants,” Ephraim said suddenly.

“Wha?” asked Ronald.

“That feller out there; he sees

you. Don't you see him beckonin'? Come on out—I'm goin' up to the roll-way."

Seizing cap and mittens, Ronald walked to the end of the veranda, the man moving forward to meet him. He was carrying a heavy logging-chain.

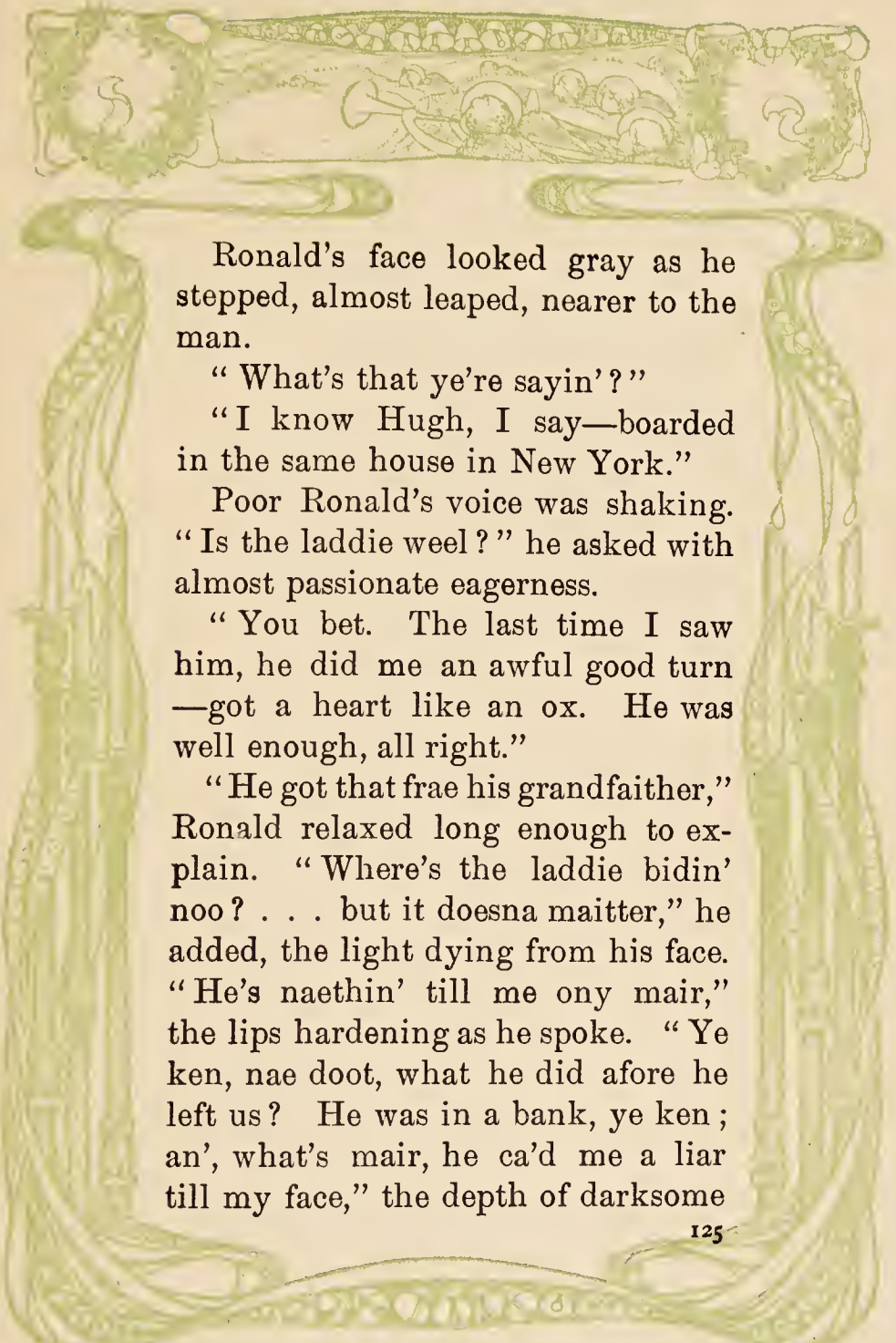
"I wanted a word with you alone," he began abruptly; "is it true your name's Robertson—Ronald Robertson? I only began work here yesterday—but one of the teamsters told me."

"Aye, that's what I maistly gangs by—what's yir ain name?"

"That don't cut any ice," replied the other, grinning; "anyhow it's Sam—Sam's enough. Is the name of your place Cloverhill Farm?"

"Aye; that was the name, tae, o' the farm my faither was hired on 'i Scotland," rejoined Ronald.

"Then I know your son, your son Hugh—in New York."



Ronald's face looked gray as he stepped, almost leaped, nearer to the man.

"What's that ye're sayin'?"

"I know Hugh, I say—boarded in the same house in New York."

Poor Ronald's voice was shaking. "Is the laddie weel?" he asked with almost passionate eagerness.

"You bet. The last time I saw him, he did me an awful good turn—got a heart like an ox. He was well enough, all right."

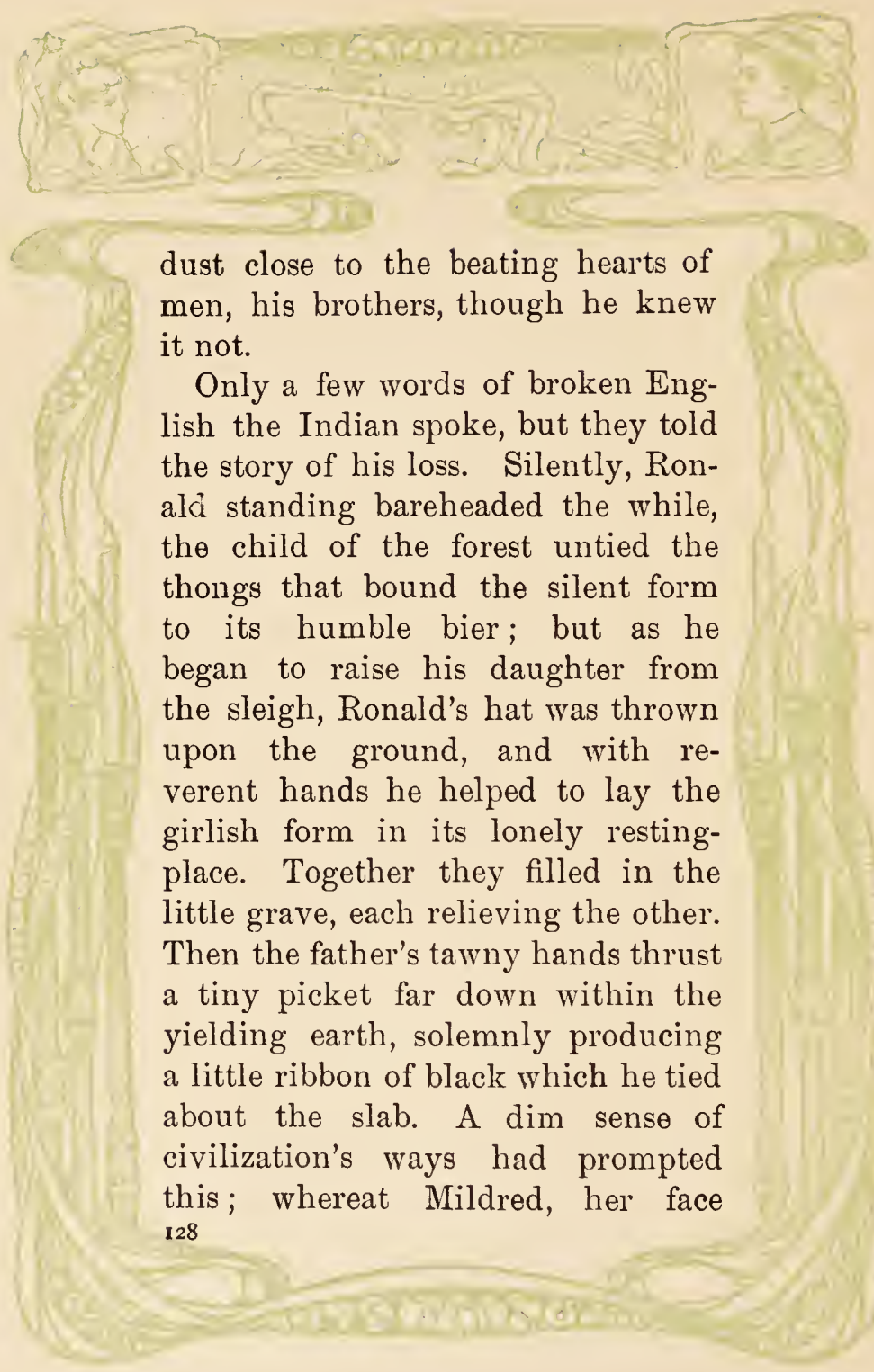
"He got that frae his grandfaither," Ronald relaxed long enough to explain. "Where's the laddie bidin' noo? . . . but it doesna maitter," he added, the light dying from his face. "He's naethin' till me ony mair," the lips hardening as he spoke. "Ye ken, nae doot, what he did afore he left us? He was in a bank, ye ken; an', what's mair, he ca'd me a liar till my face," the depth of darksome

feeling showing on the strong Scotch countenance. "An' that left me wi'oot chick or child—save yin that was an after-thocht frae God," he concluded sorrowfully, his face turned tenderly toward the little house.

At this juncture the conversation was interrupted by a cry from behind the cabin : "Oh, daddy, daddy, come here quick. Take me down there—look at that !" Ronald hurried in the direction whence the child's voice proceeded, snatching up Mildred in his arms. "Look, look there !" and the child pointed as she spoke. Ronald looked—then started swiftly down the slope, still bearing the precious load.

And as he came close to a heaving stain upon the snow-white surface, a lonely spectacle met his gaze. For a rough box lay within the shadow of the silent soil upthrown ;

and beside it there yawned the narrow cell that awaits all of woman born, a shallow grave, evidently digged the night before by hands unfamiliar with the sombre industry. And stealing stealthily across the snow, his heavy eyes fixed in dull grief upon the waiting sepulchre, there came an Indian form, one of the surviving fugitives of the forest, creeping in his loneliness closer to the haunts of men, seeking in his sorrow but to touch the hem of humanity's garment. Behind him trailed his long toboggan, heavy-freighted with the silent form of his only child. She had died far off in his lonely tent; but, responsive to that mystic sense that the forest breeds, he had heard the voice of echoing axes speaking as if with human tongues. And here, doomed to restless roving as he knew his own life to be, he would lay the precious



dust close to the beating hearts of men, his brothers, though he knew it not.

Only a few words of broken English the Indian spoke, but they told the story of his loss. Silently, Ronald standing bareheaded the while, the child of the forest untied the thongs that bound the silent form to its humble bier; but as he began to raise his daughter from the sleigh, Ronald's hat was thrown upon the ground, and with reverent hands he helped to lay the girlish form in its lonely resting-place. Together they filled in the little grave, each relieving the other. Then the father's tawny hands thrust a tiny picket far down within the yielding earth, solemnly producing a little ribbon of black which he tied about the slab. A dim sense of civilization's ways had prompted this; whereat Mildred, her face

glowing with a light as from afar, quickly stripped from her face a dusky veil she wore to shield her from the wind, binding it about the paltry emblem of a father's grief. When this was done, Ronald and the red man took a long look into each other's face. The same language leaped from both; for the Indian cast one swift glance at Mildred, then in tenderness fixed his eyes again mutely on the man, extended his hand in the strong swift clasp of human sympathy, turned, stooped to recover the rope of his toboggan, and strode swiftly back into the shadowy bosom of the tender woods.

Ronald and the girl started slowly back toward the cabin, both pondering deeply. Suddenly Mildred spoke, turning and looking back at the new-made grave.

"It looks lonely, doesn't it, daddy?"

"Aye, lassie—aye, it luiks lonely."

"Is her mother in heaven, too?"
the child asked simply.

Ronald hesitated; the destiny of the soul was a dark problem to such as he. But the child's eyes were upturned for an answer.

"Aye, Mildred, I dinna doot—aye, her mither's in heaven tae."

"Then she won't be lonely, will she?" pursued the little questioner.

"No, dear; no, she'll no' be lonely ony mair."

"If he could have his little girl back again, I guess he'd do anything she wanted him to, wouldn't he, daddy?"

"Aye, lassie, she'd have it a' her ain way, I'm thinkin'," Ronald agreed, smiling down at the little reasoner.

"Daddy!" after a long pause.

"Aye, lassie—what is it?"

"I'm nearly well, daddy."

The man's face shone. "Aye, dear," he said gladly, "I'm hopin' ye'll sune be weel." But he glanced at the delicate lips and wished that a rosier hue were theirs.

"You prayed for that, didn't you, daddy?" the child pursued.

Ronald was silent. Recounting religious feats was not his favourite pastime.

"Of course I know you did," Mildred went on, "and I often wonder if you pray for ——— You could get lots of things if you prayed for them, daddy. I'm just sure you could," the child assured him in an earnest voice, swinging round in front to look up into his face.

"It's bonnie to see my wee lassie gettin' weel again," he responded dexterously. "Luik, there's Larry—he's beckonin' on ye; run till Larry."



When the Night is Gone

“’LL slip it in while you’re unharnessin’ the kid an’ gettin’ her to bed; it’s a peach of a Christmas tree—the prettiest balsam round Shanty Bay.”

“I’m feart she winna be up till’t,” Ronald’s troubled voice replied; “the bairn’s no sae weel the nicht.”

Wherefore, after Ronald had bidden her good-night, he went back once again, holding the hot little hand as he sat on the edge of the bed beside her.

"We're haein' some bonnie fixin's for the morn," he said, hoping for a glad response.

The soulful eyes glowed up toward him through the brief silence that followed. Very sweet came the earnest voice.

"I want it to be Christmas for the men."

"To be what? What men are ye meanin'?" Ronald asked perplexed.

Mildred pointed toward a carpet-bag on the shelf—it had borne her choicest treasures to the toyless North.

"They've been so kind to me," she explained. "Larry let me turn the grindstone, when I wasn't too tired, and Barney used to let me ride on Sleepy Jake, and Jim, he let me blow the bellows—and the cook used to let me wind the clock. So I want to give Larry my necklace, and Jim my Martha Washington doll,

and Barney my music-box, and the cook my set of dishes—and if I'm not up, give my love to all the rest and tell them all Merry Christmas for me, daddy," the voice a little fainter. "Oh, daddy," she cried suddenly, "what's that? Give me my handkerchief; it's coming again—it's red—it's blood, daddy, it's blood!" the voice rising to a cry.

Ronald leaped for the light, mutely praying for better than he feared. But the ruddy glare mingled with the dread insignia as he held the lamp above, and the crimson burned itself into his soul.

He called Ephraim, then lifted the child and held her in his arms. The Christmas balsam lay on the floor without.

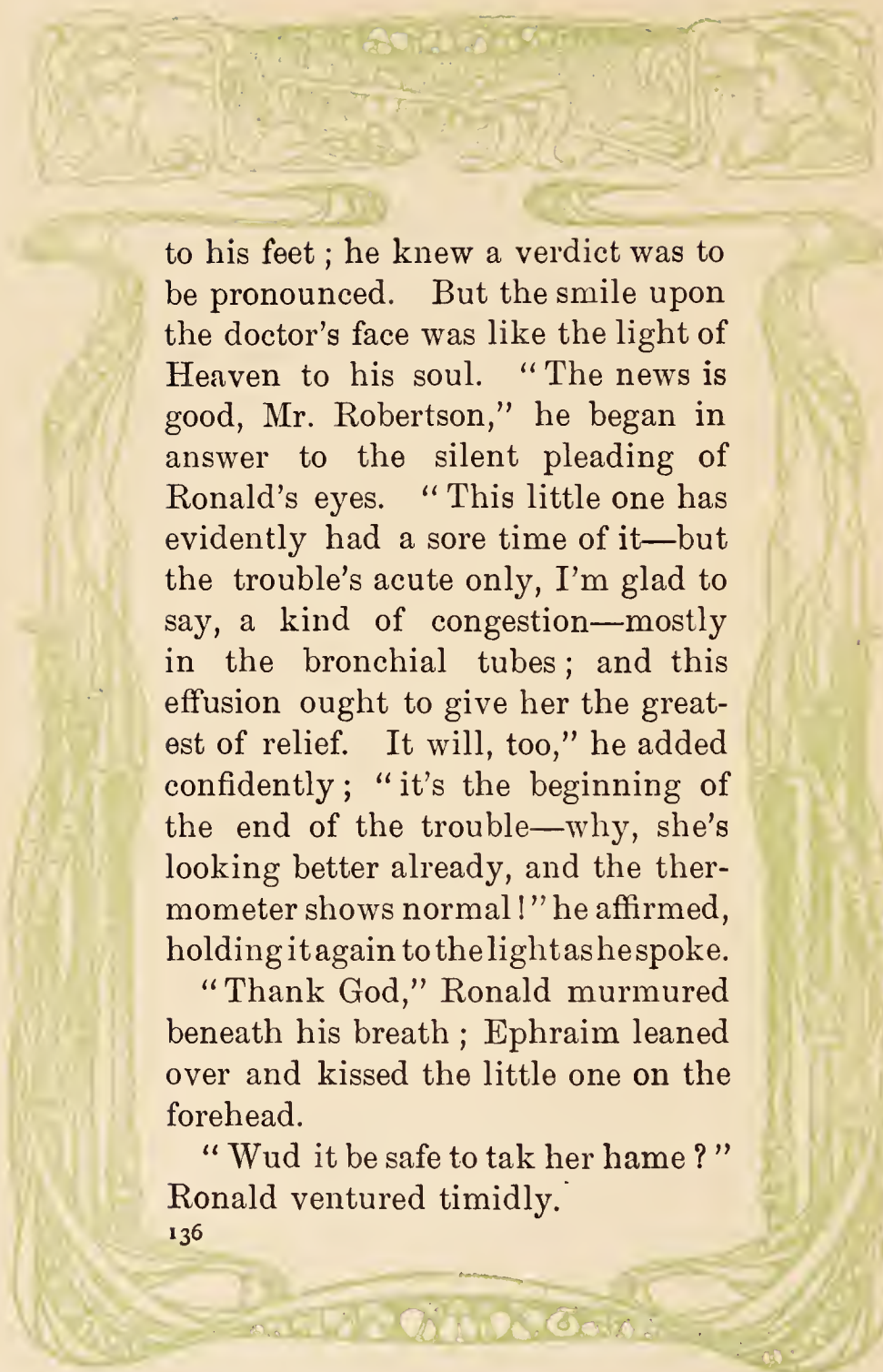
Gazing into the pallid face, his lips were moving slightly, and Ephraim caught the words: "Oh, God, if

ye'll gie her back, I'll come back mysel'—I'll gie in, Oh, Lord, if ye'll gie her back," and the untutored listener joined in the prayer as best he knew.

Suddenly Ephraim leaped from his chair. He had remembered, joyfully, that the company's doctor had reached the camp that very evening on his periodical visit; and his hurried word of explanation was scarcely uttered before he had closed the door behind him, disappearing in the direction of the adjoining shanty.

Only a few minutes had elapsed before the youthful physician was standing by the bed, the little patient's bright and eager face in striking contrast to the pale and quivering features that betrayed the anguish Ronald was enduring.

After an exhaustive examination, the doctor turned toward the bending man. Ronald rose unconsciously



to his feet ; he knew a verdict was to be pronounced. But the smile upon the doctor's face was like the light of Heaven to his soul. "The news is good, Mr. Robertson," he began in answer to the silent pleading of Ronald's eyes. "This little one has evidently had a sore time of it—but the trouble's acute only, I'm glad to say, a kind of congestion—mostly in the bronchial tubes ; and this effusion ought to give her the greatest of relief. It will, too," he added confidently ; "it's the beginning of the end of the trouble—why, she's looking better already, and the thermometer shows normal !" he affirmed, holding it again to the light as he spoke.

"Thank God," Ronald murmured beneath his breath ; Ephraim leaned over and kissed the little one on the forehead.

"Wud it be safe to tak her hame ?" Ronald ventured timidly.

The doctor thought a moment. " 'Twouldn't do a bit of harm ; good care, and lots of nourishing food, and she'd be just as well there as here. She's got the turn, and I believe she'd be just as well at home."

There was no sleep that night for the rejoicing Ronald ; nor did he seek it. Wherefore, when Mildred called him some time later, he answered almost before she spoke.

" Come and lie down beside me, daddy."

" Ye're no feart o' the dark, are ye ? " he asked as he took his place beside her, feeling for the hand that was already seeking his.

" No, oh, no—but I wanted to talk a little. Daddy, I've been thinking about last Christmas Eve. Santa Claus gave me —— "

" Aye, aye, lassie," Ronald interrupted : " I heard aboot it," he averred. This was followed by a

swift prayer for forgiveness ; how deceitful is the natural man ! thought Ronald.

“ And I don’t want any Christmas tree this year,” the child went on. “ Santa Claus gave me such lots of lovely things last year—but I want something else this year, daddy. I just want one thing—and I want you to give it to me. Nobody else can give it to me only you ; won’t you, daddy ? ”

“ What might ye be wantin’ ? ”

“ I want you to give Hugh back—to his mother. She’s so lonely ; and it’ll be a lovely Christmas present. It’s the time God gave us a wonderful present—and it’s lovely to be able to do something like that, to be able to give somebody to somebody, don’t you see, daddy ? ”

Ronald’s face was close beside the little advocate’s pleading face upon the pillow. “ Aye, lassie, aye, I see, I see, an’—— ”

"You see, daddy," broke in the earnest voice, "that's the very best kind of a present. And anyhow, daddy, it's only fair. You prayed for God to give me back to you—and He's doing it. I heard you. Well, I prayed for God to give Hugh back to you and Nanna—and I want my prayer answered just like yours. And there isn't anybody can help Him as much as you, daddy. Won't you give him back, daddy?"

In that hour God had all His will with Ronald Robertson. "Aye, lassie," he sobbed in broken accents; "aye, my darlin', I'll gie him back—I'll gie him back, my bonnie," his lips straying among the tangled locks.

Then Ronald Robertson arose and went out into the night. But it was retreating fast, with coward footsteps, before the all-conquering

Dawn. Over hill and lake, over the towering cliffs and the whispering forest, the light was breaking with grave rejoicing, healing everywhere the ravages of the dark. And in that redemptive hour, all the bitterness and resentment and wrath of Ronald's long beshadowed heart vanished to return no more, even as the mists of the night, writhing as if in torment, will flee away before the rising sun.





The Full-orbed Day



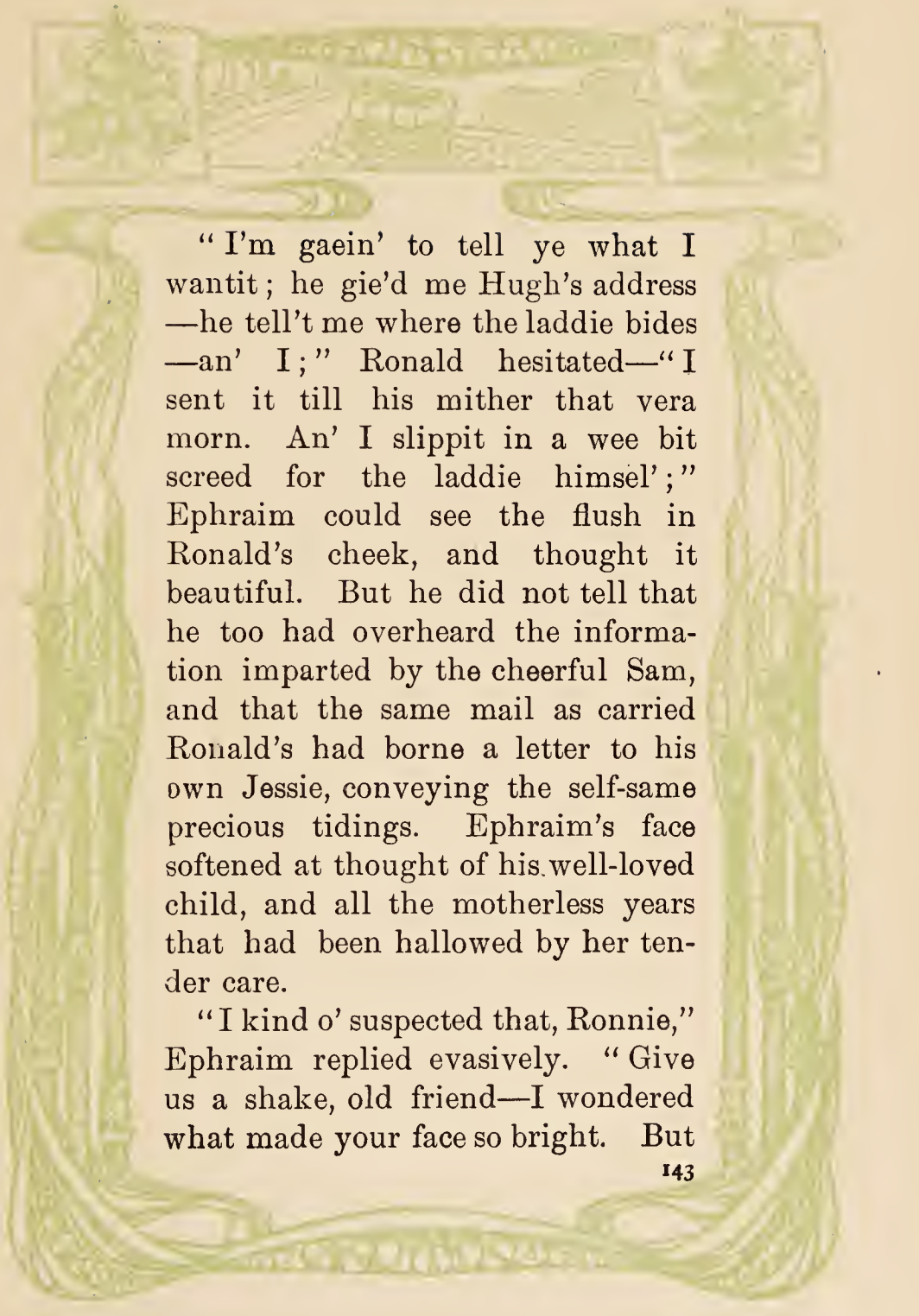
HE south-bound train was doing reasonably well, lake and forest retreating as it flew. But Ronald wondered why it loitered so, homeward bound as he was, bearing with him the trophy of his exile. For Mildred was obviously stronger, each succeeding day adding to her vigour, even as it added to Ronald's gratitude and joy. But very little had been contributed to his confidence in distinguished city doctors.

Ephraim was on the seat beside

him. He was lost in thought, the character of which would have been rarely interesting to Ronald, could he but have known. For Ephraim's meditation was of his friend at his side, and of the long, crying loneliness that must now surely be past and gone, and of the stubborn struggle that had ended in the victory which none but the defeated spirit knows. Something upon Ronald's face, a kind of chastened light, eloquent of the belated peace that had found the weary heart at last, made Ephraim sure that his old-time friend had come at length into the soul's great inheritance.

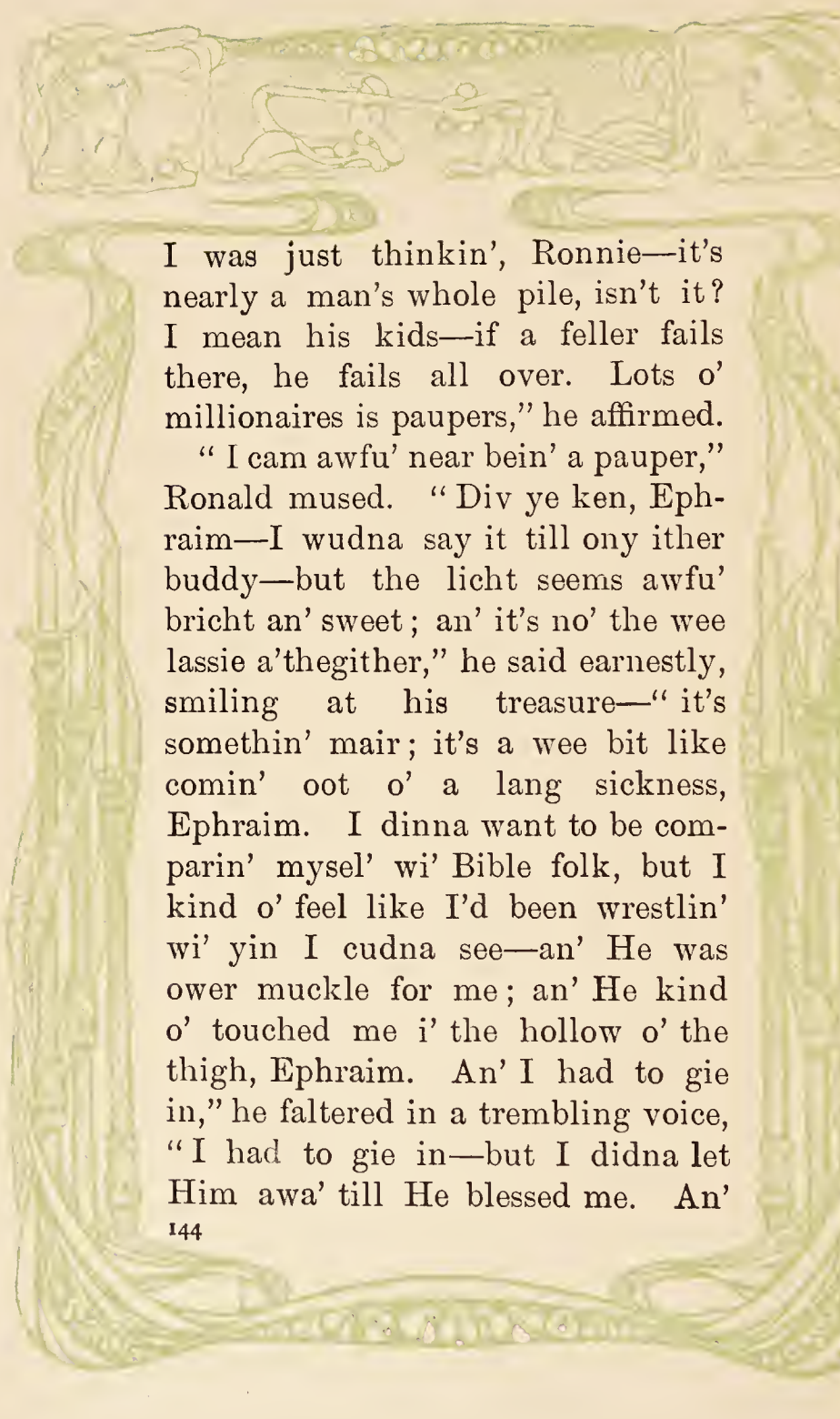
His reverie was broken by Ronald's voice: "Div ye mind that Sam buddy? I sent for him to come till the cabin, the mornin' Mildred tuk the turn."

"Yes, I mind—he's the New York feller."



“I’m gaein’ to tell ye what I wantit; he gie’d me Hugh’s address—he tell’t me where the laddie bides—an’ I;” Ronald hesitated—“I sent it till his mither that vera morn. An’ I slippit in a wee bit screed for the laddie himsel’;” Ephraim could see the flush in Ronald’s cheek, and thought it beautiful. But he did not tell that he too had overheard the information imparted by the cheerful Sam, and that the same mail as carried Ronald’s had borne a letter to his own Jessie, conveying the self-same precious tidings. Ephraim’s face softened at thought of his well-loved child, and all the motherless years that had been hallowed by her tender care.

“I kind o’ suspected that, Ronnie,” Ephraim replied evasively. “Give us a shake, old friend—I wondered what made your face so bright. But



I was just thinkin', Ronnie—it's nearly a man's whole pile, isn't it? I mean his kids—if a feller fails there, he fails all over. Lots o' millionaires is paupers," he affirmed.

"I cam awfu' near bein' a pauper," Ronald mused. "Div ye ken, Ephraim—I wudna say it till ony ither buddy—but the licht seems awfu' bricht an' sweet; an' it's no' the wee lassie a'thegither," he said earnestly, smiling at his treasure—"it's somethin' mair; it's a wee bit like comin' oot o' a lang sickness, Ephraim. I dinna want to be comparin' mysel' wi' Bible folk, but I kind o' feel like I'd been wrestlin' wi' yin I cudna see—an' He was ower muckle for me; an' He kind o' touched me i' the hollow o' the thigh, Ephraim. An' I had to gie in," he faltered in a trembling voice, "I had to gie in—but I didna let Him awa' till He blessed me. An'

juist like the ither, d'ye see, at the breakin' o' the day! Mebbe ye dinna unnerstand, Ephraim—but it's a wonnerfu' thing when wrestlin' turns intill prayer," he concluded, his glowing eyes fixed in strange tenderness upon his friend.

Nor were Ephraim's eyes undimmed. "I kind o' thought as much, Ronnie; it sort o' struck me that mornin' Mildred came back from sea. I know all the sorrow you've had, Ronnie—I was onto it all the time. An' it'll all be the makin' of you, Ronald."

"It was a sair way o' bein' made," said Ronald.

"But it does the business alright," rejoined Ephraim. "I mind hearin' a feller preach once—in th' Episcopal. He was a new minister, an' they was takin' his measure. Some said he was broad; others said he was low; lots said he was high. I thought he

was mighty long—an' dry. Only he said one thing I froze to—it was poetry, I reckon. 'Men learns,' says he, 'men learns in sufferin' what they teach in song.' An' I thought he hit the bull's-eye alright," Ephraim concluded.

"It's easier to dae the teachin' nor the learnin'," Ronald said reflectively.

"You can't," returned the other ;
"they always go in pairs."

The day was nearly gone ; and the early evening shadows were creeping about the old farmhouse as Ronald and his wife sat once again by the generous fire, recounting all the intervening days, exulting over the restoration of their threatened treasure. Mildred, too, was giving copious expression to the joy she felt at being once again amid the well-loved scenes.

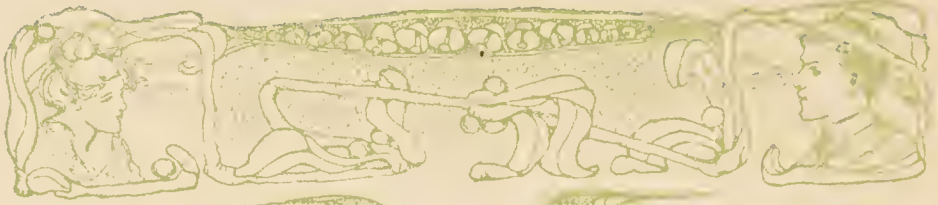
“Fetch yir wee bit toys, lassie,” Ronald bade her; “fetch doon thae toys o’ Hugh’s. Blaw the whustle, an’ crack the whup—ye’ll nae disturb onybody here.”

While the child went on her willing errand, Mary Robertson once again recited the contents of her letter to the distant Hugh. Ronald’s hand was far from steady as he held before him the answer, with its precious tidings.

“Then he micht get hame the nicht!” he exclaimed, his voice refusing to be controlled.

“Yes, Ronald—he couldn’t just tell the train. But I’m hoping it might be to-night. I’m watching,” and the glowing eyes turned again to the window, peering through the deepening dusk.

Ronald Robertson arose, turned toward the stair, and walked slowly to the room above. Tenderly he



looked about him. The boisterous prints were still upon the wall; heroic soldiers and gory Indians were not yet through with their astounding feats; the trusty sword still waited for the long vanished hand; the bird's nest was waiting yet for the brood that should return no more, and the silver-mounted collar still mourned the canine whose neck it had caressed so proudly.

Ronald walked over beside the bed. Sounds of childish revelry were wafted from below, but he heard them not. A rush of tears obscured his sight a moment; for the coverings of the bed were folded back, all white and new and beautiful—and ready. A glorious cluster of roses, winter-born, such as none but a mother's hand could have plucked from January's heart, filled the room with fragrance. And Hugh's moth-

er's Bible was on the table, just as in other days.

Ronald knelt beside the bed ; and hot tears, the tears of healing, fell like rain upon the waiting sheets, white and stainless though they were.

" Oh, God," the choking voice was pleading, " it surely canna be that Thou pitiest the same as a faither does ! Teach a puir sinfu' man, oh God, how to welcome a wanderin' laddie hame. I canna learn mysel'. Mak me as patient wi' him as th' Almichty's been wi' me ; for I've sinned far mair again' Thee nor the laddie has again' his faither. It's a late gift, I ken, oh, Lord, but I gie mysel'——"

The prayer was never finished. His wife's voice was calling from below ; her soul throbbing in the cry.

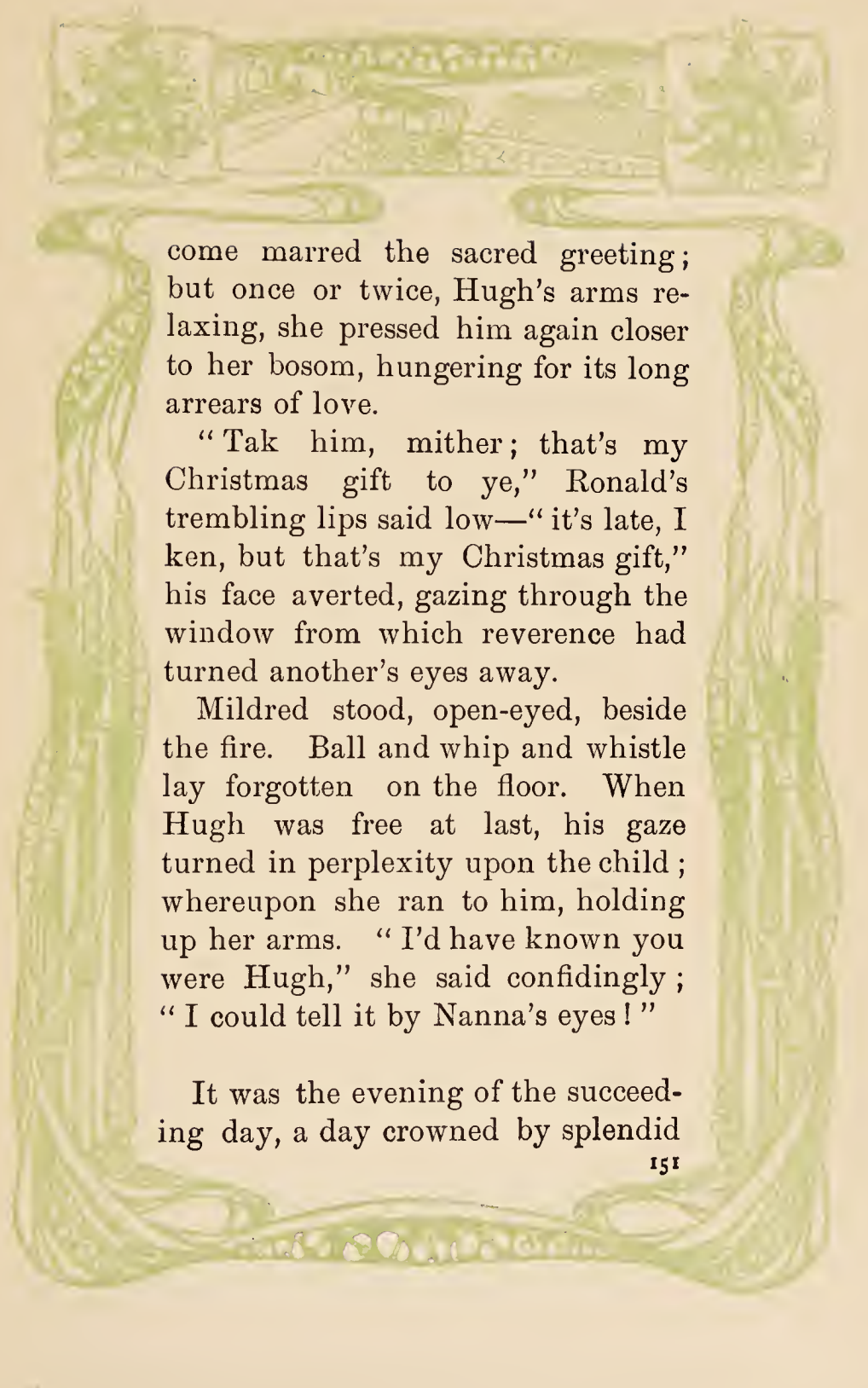
Ronald was at her side in a moment. She was by the window, her face close to the pane. She did not

move, nor even point, but Ronald's eyes joined the holy chase with a swiftness that only the hungering heart could lend.

"Gang, mither—ye maun gang," he whispered hoarsely.

His wife turned her face full on his—but she spoke no word. Eloquent and wonderful, the swimming eyes poured out their bidding. Ronald knew—and in a moment the door had closed behind him. Then the mother turned from the window and looked no more; but her heart was pouring out its load to God.

It was not long—Mary Robertson knew not how long—when the door was opened again, and Hugh and Ronald entered. Hugh's eyes leaped to his mother's face, and the stalwart son, his arms outstretched, took the trembling woman to his heart. No sound escaped her, no words of wel-

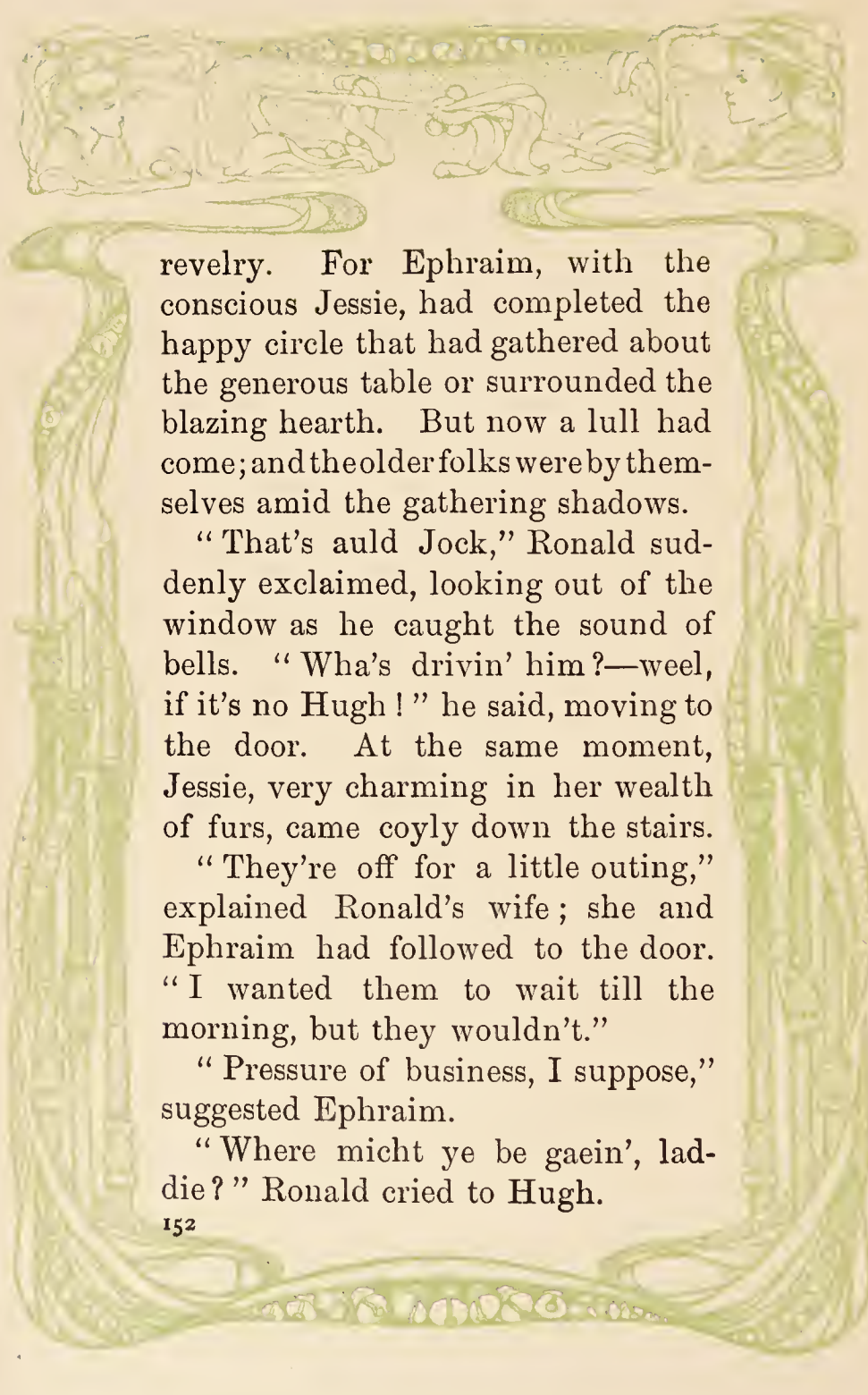


come marred the sacred greeting ;
but once or twice, Hugh's arms relaxing, she pressed him again closer to her bosom, hungering for its long arrears of love.

"Tak him, mither ; that's my Christmas gift to ye," Ronald's trembling lips said low—"it's late, I ken, but that's my Christmas gift," his face averted, gazing through the window from which reverence had turned another's eyes away.

Mildred stood, open-eyed, beside the fire. Ball and whip and whistle lay forgotten on the floor. When Hugh was free at last, his gaze turned in perplexity upon the child ; whereupon she ran to him, holding up her arms. "I'd have known you were Hugh," she said confidingly ; "I could tell it by Nanna's eyes !"

It was the evening of the succeeding day, a day crowned by splendid



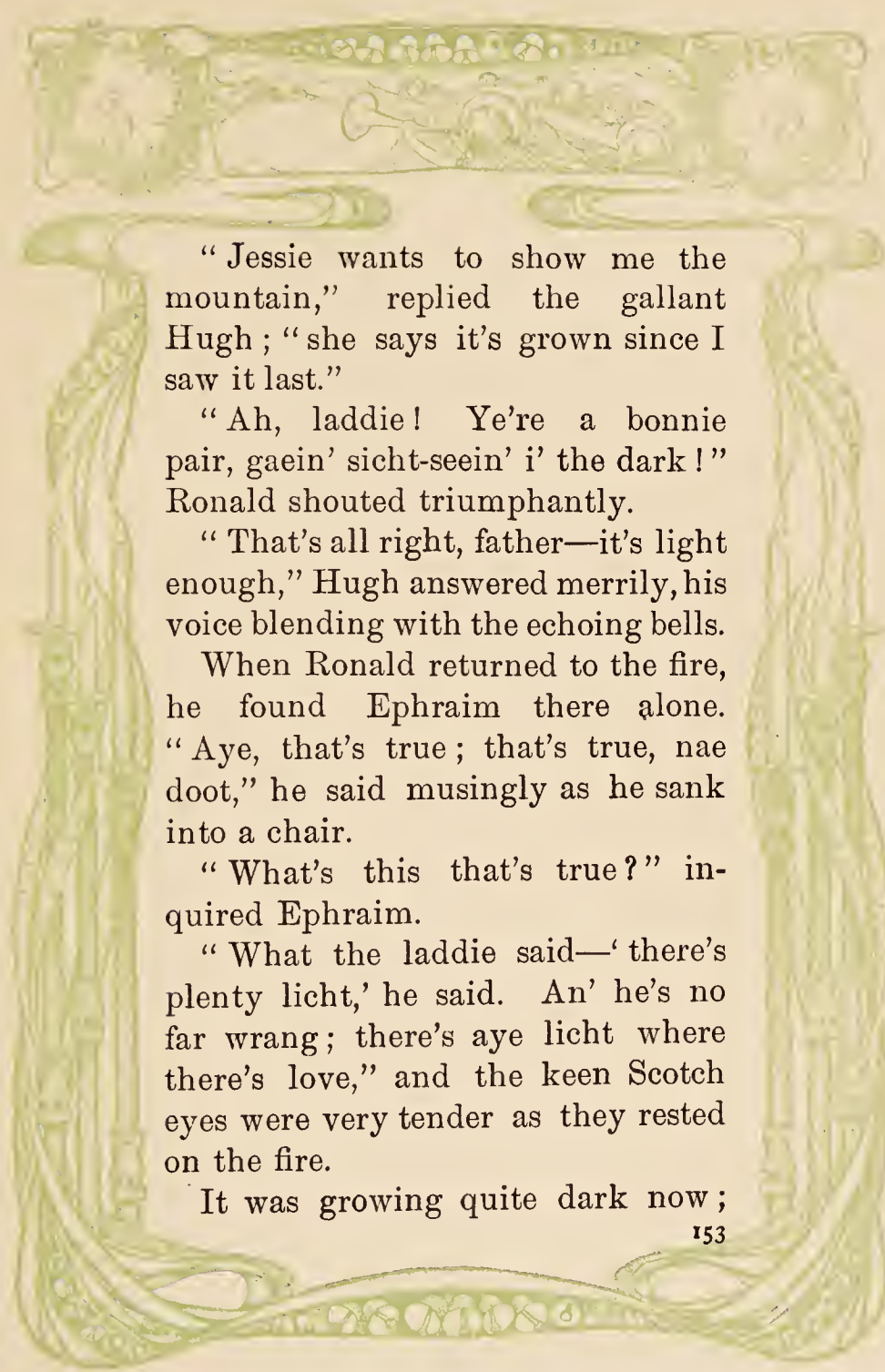
revelry. For Ephraim, with the conscious Jessie, had completed the happy circle that had gathered about the generous table or surrounded the blazing hearth. But now a lull had come; and the older folks were by themselves amid the gathering shadows.

"That's auld Jock," Ronald suddenly exclaimed, looking out of the window as he caught the sound of bells. "Wha's drivin' him?—weel, if it's no Hugh!" he said, moving to the door. At the same moment, Jessie, very charming in her wealth of furs, came cooly down the stairs.

"They're off for a little outing," explained Ronald's wife; she and Ephraim had followed to the door. "I wanted them to wait till the morning, but they wouldn't."

"Pressure of business, I suppose," suggested Ephraim.

"Where micht ye be gaein', lad-die?" Ronald cried to Hugh.



“Jessie wants to show me the mountain,” replied the gallant Hugh; “she says it’s grown since I saw it last.”

“Ah, laddie! Ye’re a bonnie pair, gaein’ sicht-seein’ i’ the dark!” Ronald shouted triumphantly.

“That’s all right, father—it’s light enough,” Hugh answered merrily, his voice blending with the echoing bells.

When Ronald returned to the fire, he found Ephraim there alone. “Aye, that’s true; that’s true, nae doot,” he said musingly as he sank into a chair.

“What’s this that’s true?” inquired Ephraim.

“What the laddie said—‘there’s plenty licht,’ he said. An’ he’s no far wrang; there’s aye licht where there’s love,” and the keen Scotch eyes were very tender as they rested on the fire.

It was growing quite dark now;

and both men, as such friends may, were drinking deep of the luxury of silence. The fire had sunk to a quiet ember glow when Ronald spoke.

"Ephraim," he said gently, "I want ye to gang wi' me."

"Where to?" asked Ephraim; "not goin' back to Shanty Bay?"

"No, Ephraim—but I'll tell ye where. I'm gaein' till the Saicrament again—it's a week frae the comin' Sabbath. An' I want ye to gang wi' me, Ephraim. We've had mony happy years wi' ane anither, an' I'm wishin' we cud tak the feast thegither. Wull ye no come wi' me, Ephraim?"

The ember glow burned deep and strong and silent while the two men sat in unbroken stillness.

"I'm not fit," Ephraim said at last; "I'm just a sinner, Ronnie—nothin' but a sinner."

"That's why I wantit ye," Ronald

answered in the gentlest tone. "That's the vera credential that ye need. The Saicrament's no a winnin'-post," he went on quaintly; "it's the place where sinners maks a new beginnin'. We a' begin at the Cross—an' the Saicrament's juist a wee bit pictur' o' the Cross," he concluded simply, his eyes turned in wistful love upon his friend.

"I've often wanted to," and Ephraim's voice was scarcely audible; "for He's done a lot for me."

"Ephraim," and Ronald drew his chair a little closer, "div ye mind that Christmas Eve—the nicht we had the daein's wi' Mildred's Christmas tree? Div ye mind tellin' me yirsel' aboot the graun' fun there is in givin' ?—ye said the Cross was the high-water mark. Div ye mind that, Ephraim?"

"Yes," the other answered thoughtfully, "yes, I remember."

“ Weel, Ephraim, I want ye to gie yirsel’—to gie yirsel’ to Him. There’s nae ither gift worth speakin’ o’—an’ that’s what ye dae at the Saicrament. Wull ye no gang wi’ me, Ephraim ? ”

The silence was long maintained ; but, just as the dying fire leaped into sudden flame, Ephraim’s answer came.

“ I think I’ll go, Ronnie,” he said in simple earnestness ; “ if He’ll take me, I’ll give myself, the same as you.”

Ronald rose to his feet and took the well-loved hand in his. “ Aye, He’ll tak us baith, Ephraim—an’ He’ll never gie us back to oor ain foolish hands. He’ll keep us till the mornin’s here.”

“ He’ll have to,” Ephraim answered quietly ; “ there isn’t no one else that can.”



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